

**Poverty, Religion and Prejudice in Nineteenth Century Britain:**

**The Catholic Irish in Birmingham 1800-c1880.**

By

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## **Abstract**

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Poverty, Religion and Prejudice in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Catholic Irish in Birmingham 1800-c1880.

The mass migration of Irish into Britain in the nineteenth century was a significant event as it was the first mass influx of immigrants in the modern period that set templates for immigrant recognition as well as articulations of ethnic, national and religious difference within the British national discourse that are still relevant today.

Birmingham was an important town and city in the industrial era that has been characterised as a classic socially mobile liberal configuration. However, the role of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice in Birmingham undermines this thesis. Links between Birmingham and Ireland in connection with military associations, as well as some settlement, begin in the 17th century. Significant Irish settlement is discernible from the 1820s with the West of Ireland providing most of the migrants due possibly to ease of movement, kinship networks and knowledge of Birmingham as a destination from seasonal Irish agricultural and navigation workers. Also, the vagaries of the Poor Law and its interpretation by Officers and Magistrates determined migration and settlement patterns to some degree in Birmingham and its area.

The appearance of the concept of the “Irish Area” is linked to negative attributes of health, class position, Catholic populations and surveillance instigated by middle class anxieties towards the developing urban areas and their new populations and were in many senses constructed within the public discourse. This said, ethnic Irish Catholic clustering was a feature of these districts and the situation of previous Catholic populations and institutions seems to have influenced settlement patterns to some extent. Original economic engagement of the migrants was in the peripatetic agricultural and construction sectors. Those that did settle were characterised as being mainly involved in the building trade, itself an extension of the previous occupations of harvesting and navvying. However, Irish economic engagement was far more diverse than this developing throughout the period into a wide range of trades with evidence of a growing middle class. Perception within the sources point to a positive and negative view of Irish workers in Birmingham. Some employers describe the Irish as hard working and reliable. Working class economic competitors indicate hostility to the Irish due to depressed wages and conditions. This created an economic underpinning for anti-Irishness within elements of the working class; capitalist market relations in the labour supply came to be conceptualised along ethno-national lines rather than those of class conflict.

Birmingham was an important centre of the Catholic revival in Britain. The Irish were an important factor in this recovery providing resources and a new social mission for the Church which responded in turn by establishing social, educational and to some extent political support for the new population. This in turn impacted negatively on the Irish in stimulating anti-Catholicism - and by proxy anti-Irishness - in the town, foregrounding the ethno-national-religious boundary between native and migrant

identities and fostering notions of “Britishness” and “Irishness”. This discursive process provided ideological and rhetorical ammunition for political entrepreneurs to exploit for instrumental political projects. In the context of 1867, with State and Nation under threat from anti imperialist Irish revolutionaries at home and abroad, religious tensions over the Irish supported Catholic revival, disestablishment of the Protestant Church in Ireland and the unknown dangers of political enfranchisement of the masses, the fusing of anti-Catholicism with anti-Irishness was utilised by political entrepreneurs and anti-Catholic organisations such as the Orange Order to incorporate the working class into the British nation building project, resulting in mass outbreaks of violence and political gains for anti-Irish/Catholic politicians. This project was fundamentally one of boundary creation between identities that has resonances in the public and political discourse on immigrants and minorities through to the present day.









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**Appendix 1.**

**The Irish “Areas” in Central Birmingham.**



## **Author Declarations**

1. During the period of registered study in which this dissertation was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material included in this dissertation has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
3. The programme of advanced study of which this dissertation is part has consisted of:
  - (i) Research Design and Methods course - Year 1.
  - (ii) Participation in Research Colloquia.
  - (iii) Supervision tutorials.

[All above were held in the School of Humanities DeMontfort University].

  - (iv) Attendance at relevant research conferences.

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# **I: Introduction.**

## **Chapter 1.**

### **The Irish Immigrant in Nineteenth Century Britain: Historical Debates and Empirical Evidence.**

During the nineteenth century hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women sailed to British ports, part of a migration that was one of the most significant population movements of the modern period. Some settled permanently in Britain but many others passed through on their way to the New World and other destinations. Although they had begun to inhabit some of the towns and cities of Britain in significant numbers by the late eighteenth century, it was during the nineteenth century that Irish immigrants became a conspicuous and permanent feature of British urban life, profoundly affecting the society into which they were received.

There are a number of reasons that make this historical event interesting and important to historians. Firstly, the study of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain offers an historical perspective into the nature of immigration into Britain with historical information for academics investigating modern articulations of anti-immigrant prejudices and the effect of mass migration upon ethnic community relations within modern societies. This group offers an historical paradigm of mass immigration which is distanced from contemporary debates surrounding post-war colonial immigration while demonstrating similarities in class and ethnic status and the effects of perceptions



upon the formation of stereotypes and prejudicial discourses. The second reason for studying the Irish in nineteenth century Britain concerns their role within the great social transformation of the Victorian industrial era. During the years 1800-1900 a predominantly rural population was changed into a highly urban and industrialised society during a period of Britain's economic and political pre-eminence at the height of imperial dominion and status as the first manufacturing nation. Also, the burgeoning cities and industrial areas drew in migrant labour from the surrounding countryside and further afield as the process of rural to urban migration expanded. Therefore the study of this migration and settlement is important in revealing the dynamics and processes of an important modern phenomenon during a significant period. Another important issue to address is the lack of knowledge relating to the heterogeneity of the Irish experience at the local level in order to delineate historiographical gaps as well as underlining trends and practices already highlighted by previous studies.

The subject of Irish history has a long and venerable place within British historical studies the two islands being inexorably linked by geography, politics, economics and culture since the earliest of recorded history. Within this historical tradition the subject of Irish immigrants in Britain has been, until recently, somewhat under researched. However, recently a growing body of national, regional and local studies into Britain's oldest and most numerous immigrant group of the modern period has been undertaken. This study will contribute to a greater understanding of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain by examining the group within the important local and urban context of Birmingham.

The thesis has been divided into four thematic sections. This first section introduces the historiography of the Irish in Britain and goes on to outline some of the major themes that are covered in the following sections. Section two examines the settlement patterns of the Catholic Irish in nineteenth century Birmingham before reviewing and questioning the evidence of their economic engagement with the town and the prejudice this engendered within the native proletarian workforce. Part three analyses the role that the Catholic Church and anti-Catholicism played in the lives of the Irish Catholic immigrant in nineteenth century Birmingham. This section is divided into three chapters. The first chapter reveals the importance of the Catholic Church in spiritual, educational, charitable, and political terms for the Birmingham Irish and the central role that Birmingham played in the Catholic revival in Britain. The next two chapters examine the expressions of anti-Catholicism in Britain and Birmingham and the long, medium and short term factors that led to a mass outbreak of ethnic violence against the Catholic Irish in Birmingham during the summer of 1867. The final section concludes the thesis and examines the importance of the migrant Catholic Irish in the nation building project of the Protestant British state.

Pioneers of the history of the Irish in Britain include John Denvir and Hugh Heinrich writing in the late nineteenth century, and J. E. Handley and J. A. Jackson writing in the late 1940s and early 1960s respectively. Substantial localised studies since the 1970s by Lynn Lees, Frances Finigan and W.J. Lowe have been complemented by the more recent work of Donald MacRaild. There have been many shorter or less specific studies, the most useful having been collected in three edited volumes by Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The themes of these writers tend to centre upon

ideas of poverty, nationalism, ethnicity and religion and cluster their researches around the period that coincides with the Great Famine mass immigration of the late 1840s up to the 1870s; others continue up until 1922.<sup>2</sup> This has been a convenient periodisation due to its encompassing of Britain's imperial and economic peak that coincided with an unprecedented mass emigration from rural Britain. It has also been popular due to the availability of census material regarding the Irish born since 1840. However, this has been detrimental to studies covering the first half of the century and earlier and this thesis shall attempt to redress this balance a little. Although encompassing some evidence before 1800 and some after 1870, the focus is between these two dates spanning as they do the initial and mid phase periods of urbanisation, economic revolution and the early mid and peak period of Irish migration and community establishment in Britain. Also this period covers a number of important events relating to the mainly Catholic Irish in Britain and their reception by the mainly Protestant host community as well as the development of modern discourses upon health, and deviance, the development of political representation and contestation linked to enfranchisement of the masses and colonial tensions in Ireland. It is hoped to add to the research that examines the part played by the Irish in a locality that was vitally important to the growth of modern industrial Britain. Patterns of settlement integration and exclusion are of particular interest as is the nature of the immigrant society and economic engagement in the labour force and business community. An important focus of research will be the effects of anti-Catholicism in Birmingham on the Irish migrant and how the political agendas of certain key local figures and local and national organisations in the mid-nineteenth century led to violence against the Birmingham Catholic Irish community in a week of rioting in 1867.



Many local studies of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain have concentrated on the wealth of information presented by the national census returns. This study, however, has deliberately chosen to take a more diverse textual look at the Irish in Birmingham for a number of reasons. Although the census provides much of the information that is essential to an understanding of the group in this period and provides a platform to base much empirical work, the census is also problematic, especially when dealing with the Irish. Firstly, the highly seasonal and transitory nature of the Irish population<sup>3</sup> - migrating throughout the British Isles settling and re-migrating within Britain and on to the New World<sup>4</sup> - meant that the census enumerator was recording a snapshot of a community in flux on only one day per decade. Factors of economic cycle and season could radically alter the numbers of such a peripatetic group. Also, place of birth was only recorded from 1841, and only reliably from 1851, leaving out nearly half of the century. Other limitations include the generic problems of accurate recording,<sup>5</sup> avoidance of officialdom,<sup>6</sup> and the serious limitation of only registering those born in Ireland as Irish therefore missing those of second and third generation with Irish identifications. Also, the complication of national identification linked to religious practice confuses issues of community. Those of a Protestant identification may have been born in Ireland but considered themselves a discrete community to their Catholic Irish neighbours and vice versa but would not be picked up by the census. These qualifying factors need to be addressed when using census figures to calculate the size of the group, those who considered themselves Irish - and, importantly, were considered as such by other groups - as well as those who were enumerated as being born in Ireland. Another factor in the decision not to pursue the census route was the



desire not to repeat work already undertaken. The existence of detailed census studies of the Irish in Birmingham by Zeisler and Chinn, some of which are yet to be published, was taken into account when deciding the route to take for this study. This said, the census is utilised in a limited way in a number of chapters by quoting Zeisler and Chinn or through some primary research.

The study will also deal with certain theoretical concerns surrounding emigration, settlement, colonialism, ethnicity and nationalism during a key phase of modern British history. This part of the study will deal fundamentally with the relation between ideology and discourse within a period of economic, social and political upheaval that characterized the nineteenth century. The work intends to introduce the notions of class, ethnic and religious prejudices to help explain the reactions, perceptions and discourses surrounding a subaltern group in a religiously and nationalistically orientated society. Although dealing with these issues in such a way is perhaps unique, the majority of the originality of the work is concerned with researching the untold stories of some of the Irish in nineteenth century Birmingham.

The research has been conducted via primary and secondary sources. The use of published texts by scholars in the fields of British social history, Irish history, urban history, ethnicity, and sociology is complemented by government reports, papers and contemporary accounts in newspapers, journals, personal letters and other primary sources. New evidence will be presented from archival material held in the Birmingham Reference Library Local Studies Collections and Birmingham City Archives as well as

from the two major institutions of the Catholic Church in Birmingham and other national archives such as the British Library and Public Record Office. As the group under investigation has been characterised in the sources as mainly of a Catholic and working class identity, the work produces some new evidence of the middle class Irish in nineteenth century Birmingham whilst recognising the preeminence of the low class position of Birmingham's Irish community. The historical distance between the subjects and the researcher mitigates ethical problems relating to the situation of the research towards the groups discussed. However, it is important to take into account that the findings could have real resonances in the present discourse on Catholic versus Protestant and the debates surrounding issues of "race" and ethnicity and it is hoped these will be positive in the light of new understandings.

Irish migration to Britain in the nineteenth century is a complex field that has a number of well-researched areas and a number of gaps. The Irish migrants were a mix of dissimilar classes, and identities, possessing differing skills, loyalties and resources. As already mentioned the focus of research within Irish migration studies has been until recently centred upon the most visible immigrant and during the most dramatic period of immigration. The poor, male, Catholic, post-Great Famine immigrants have drawn researchers to them, the period between 1830 and 1870 receiving the lion's share of published research somewhat to the detriment of other periods and alternative migrant experiences.<sup>7</sup> Although this work has been drawn inevitably by the sources to this same period, it has been an element of the study to look beyond and within the standard periodisation (as well as the stereotypes and representations of the poor Catholic Irish) to

hopefully explore some of the myths that have accreted to them as a discursively constructed group over time

and provide new insights into their lives.

The historical debate surrounding the settlement and development of Irish migrants in nineteenth century Britain has focused on a number of broad issues. Firstly, there has been a discussion concerned with the reasons behind the Irish leaving Ireland and choosing routes and destinations for settlement. Secondly are the contentions and investigations surrounding the processes and patterns of Irish settlement, employment and social organization. Thirdly, the controversies surrounding the effects on the immigrant and host society of these choices/processes/patterns and the perceptions and reactions of the different groups involved within and without the immigrant group to each other. Here, theories dealing with the extent to which Irish immigrants integrated with - or chose or were forced to isolate themselves from - British society are to the fore. The attempts to find answers to these questions have been conceptualised around issues of poverty and class, nationalism, religion, and ethnicity. The study engages with all these issues to greater and lesser extents.

The complex reasons for Irish immigration into Britain can be most succinctly analysed by using a system of contextualisation that splits the factors into three broad groups - push, pull and enabling factors. Pull factors in nineteenth century Britain included the long standing tradition of economic attraction presented by work opportunities that were to expand along with the nineteenth century economy, the inducement of



pioneering emigrants sending remittances for friends and families as well as having established a foothold in the new communities. Push factors such as population increase in Ireland, changes in the economy, political factors, crop failures and the land tenure system, all affected decisions to leave. The enabling factors consisted of economic means, educational factors, awareness of migration as a viable alternative to life in Ireland, the closeness of Britain as a destination, the lack of a political border and the availability of cheap, safe transport and knowledge of routes and destinations. All helped to facilitate the mass Irish exodus of the nineteenth century and will be explored later in more depth relating to the Irish in Birmingham.

Research into the Irish migration in nineteenth century Britain falls into three broad periods centred on the Great Famine of the late 1840s. The pre-Great Famine period deals with all immigration previous to the late 1840s. The period of the Great Famine itself runs from the late 1840s through to the early 1850s. The post-Great Famine period begins around 1850 up until the late nineteenth century. Pre-famine, the factors of population growth, decline of Irish proto-industry, the commercialisation of agriculture leading to farm consolidation and growing dependence upon the potato all played a role. Also, enabling factors of increased mobility via the rapid expansion of steam ship transportation and rising literacy in Ireland engendered the growth of an awareness of emigration as a feasible life choice. All contributed to creating the context for emigration as an alternative to life - or in many cases privation and death - in Ireland. The Act of Union in 1800 removed the political barrier to emigration and the continuing industrialisation of the British economy drew in labour throughout the period. Also, the long tradition of seasonal harvesting work that had been stimulated by the demand for home grown produce during



the Napoleonic Wars increased labour demand along with the development of agricultural mechanisation, single crop specialism and the relative immobility of the English rural labourer. All these factors were relevant to the Irish immigration to Britain. The Great Famine stimulated the process of migration and confirmed pre-existing patterns of population transfers and chain migration.

Irish immigration to Britain was already significant during the pre-Famine phase; excluding Scotland, 289,404 Irish born were recorded in England and Wales in 1841 during the first census to record place of birth. Numbers reached universally conspicuous levels in Britain during the Great Famine and immediate post-Famine periods reaching 519,959 by 1851 and peaking at 601,643 Irish born recorded in the 1861 census. Immigrant numbers began to diminish by the end of the century reaching 566,540, or 2.5% of the total population of England and Wales by 1871.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Irish became the first significant modern urban migrants of the industrial age in Britain.

The classic arguments for this migration turn on ideas of Irish economic crisis, a backward agrarian economy, large expanding population and - centrally - a feudalised land tenure system resistant to modernisation that discouraged investment and reconstruction. Concomitantly, a large increase in population from the late seventeenth century up to 1840 led to the Malthusian reading of the inevitability of migration due to underdevelopment.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the inevitable conclusion of a “backward” and “profligate” nation was mass emigration.<sup>10</sup> J. Mokyr and C. O’Grada shed doubt on the mounting Irish economic/agrarian crisis theory and some historians - especially Irish ones - accept that the imperialistic domination and exploitation of Ireland by Britain is

the foundation of many of the Irish economy's problems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional explanation for the mass emigration should be weighed against the fact that the poorest were not the ones who emigrated in such great numbers. It was those who had the knowledge, capital, determination and the ambition to move who were most able to. Indeed it was those who were at the bottom of the economic league that were not driven out or chose to leave, as they had no choice but to stay. It is important to remember that in general it was the poorer emigrant that went first to Britain; some settled and others - through a process of step migration when sufficient capital had been accumulated - proceeded on to the American continent or elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> Although the rising population and the affects of the Great Famine did influence numbers, a tradition of emigration and enabling factors must not be forgotten in the engendering of movement between the two islands.

By the late nineteenth century Irish immigration began to decline. Those settling in London had decreased from a high of 109,000 in 1851 down to 66,000 by 1891.<sup>13</sup> One explanation for the drop in emigration is put forward by Timothy Hatton and Jeffrey Williamson who demonstrate a correlation between rising real wages in Ireland compared with emigrant destinations and a fall in emigration rates. They hypothesise that land and religious reforms, a fading of the fear of famine and the recovery of the Irish economy from 1850 onwards, all combined to cut migration rates.<sup>14</sup>

The established understanding of Irish migration to Britain in the nineteenth century revolves around the effects of the Great Famine in stimulating destitute Irish migrants

into Britain. The famine did effect numbers, but only reinforced a long-standing pattern of migration that was already present. The Great Famine migration of the Irish into Britain did differ in a number of ways from the exodus to the New World, however. Firstly, because of the close cultural, economic, political and geographical links between the two islands, emigration to Britain never had the permanence of migration further afield. Secondly, Irish migration to Britain had a long history going back to at least the Middle Ages. Thirdly, there was a likewise long tradition of seasonal migration from Ireland to Britain. Lastly, a large number of those migrants and their descendants who settled in Britain after the Great Famine re-emigrated mainly to the United States of America.<sup>15</sup>

Reasons for this exodus can be understood from economic and political perspectives. The economic and political domination of Ireland by its larger and richer neighbour - Britain - proved to be a break on the development of Irish political and economic institutions and resources. The lack of mineral resources in Ireland contributed to the financial moribundity of the Irish economy making it vulnerable to the dominance of its powerful neighbour. Also, Ireland's relative isolation from the major routes of communication and trade along with the lack of a national economy and legitimated national political base of its own, held back Irish economic development. Kerby Miller has noted a slow change in the perspective of the Irish towards emigration during the pre-Famine period that was influenced by the lack of opportunities to economic and social improvement in Ireland. This aspiration for upward mobility was best resolved within the opportunities that Britain and its empire offered and many Irish men and women decided that emigration was a rational move for economic and social



advancement. Miller notes that Anglo-Irish and Ulster Protestants were particularly motivated in this respect.<sup>16</sup>

Those emigrants from Ireland who made the journey to Britain came via three main routes. The Northern approach from Ulster and North Connaught via Belfast and Londonderry to Scotland, many landing at Glasgow. The southern approach from South Leinster and Munster that went via Dublin to Newport South Wales, Holyhead in North Wales or Bristol on to London or the Midlands. The route from Connaught and Leinster went via Dublin to the north of England mainly via Liverpool.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of Irish migrants in Britain were young and single with males slightly outnumbering females. They were characteristically urban dwellers while penetrating all areas of Britain to some extent. Among the most significant areas of settlement were the Lowlands of Scotland, Lancashire, South Wales and the industrial Midlands. The large towns and cities all attracted the Irish in great numbers. London had the largest Irish born population; 108,548 Irish born in 1851 followed by the northern ports of entry Liverpool (83,813) and Glasgow (59,801). Manchester was the next largest in terms of settlement (52,504) and significant numbers arrived in Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds. However, although conspicuous settlement was concentrated in the great cities, two-thirds of the Irish were settled outside these urban centres and it would be wrong to assume there was a general pattern of settlement. The Irish were found everywhere to some degree in Victorian Britain.<sup>18</sup> Much research has concentrated on the clustering of the Irish in areas of the great cities where they were to be perceived as a moral contagion and great social problem occupying, as many did, some of the most decrepit of housing that the Victorian city had to offer. Studies conducted into the

settlements in Britain have tried to delineate whether the Irish were situated in discrete areas of settlement, segregated socially and physically from their English neighbours in so called “Little Irelands” or whether the demographical settlement of Irish immigrants was more dispersed. It may be said that the clustering of poor ethnically discreet groups during the initial period of immigration may have been a visible aspect to contemporary commentators, but how the Irish community developed and progressed geographically and socially as members became more affluent (or less so) is an area open to debate and in need of further research. The settlement patterns of Irish immigrants in the Victorian City is an area that is complex and heterogeneous. It is hoped that this study will shed light upon their experience in the context of a relatively liberal city with an alleged system of fluid social mobility.<sup>19</sup>

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the changing British economy presented new opportunities for those immigrants that showed the will and had the capital to make the journey to Britain and elsewhere. Developments in the national economy demanded improvements in construction and communications. Redford notes that in this particular sector: “It was quite usual for nine tenths of the workforce to be of Irish extraction”.<sup>20</sup> Industry, mining and manufacture were also important occupations; coal, iron, steel and textiles became the engines of industrial expansion.

The new nation required civil servants, soldiers and administrators for home and the colonies. Service and urban occupations expanded along with the cities - merchants, bankers, business men, builders, domestic servants, porters, street cleaners, coal heavers, street hawkers, publicans and landlords, tailors, tanners, weavers and pressers.

All the above occupations, and many more, were undertaken by the immigrant Irish in nineteenth century Britain, as well as less respectable occupations such as prostitution, petty thievery, robbery, burglary and counterfeiting.<sup>21</sup> Letford and Pooley are among the first to research the neglected area of the role of Irish women within the British workforce in Liverpool. They note that Irish women were heavily concentrated in low paid casual service, retail and domestic work, the most common form of employment being dressmaking, followed by retailing and domestic service.<sup>22</sup>

Without doubt the availability of a large reservoir of competitively priced labour - flexible and mobile at a time of rapid economic expansion - greatly contributed to the economic wealth of the new "British" nation. The classic argument that surrounds the Irish in regard to employment is that of their effect on the wages of indigenous workers due to the competition they introduced. In this context, many contemporary and more recent commentators saw the effect of the reserve labour force on wages and conditions as damaging the standard of living of the native working class and instrumental in the fostering of the Irish communities' exclusion.<sup>23</sup> Certainly many conflicts between immigrant Irish and the resident English were articulated around issues of work and wages but just as important was the existence of sectarian recruitment strategies, particularly where there was a strong local presence from the Orange Order.<sup>24</sup> Others such as Jeffery Williamson have revised this assumption of the Irish lowering wages and conditions via an economic model that suggests this played a very marginal part in fostering industrialisation and wage restraint, a contention that E. J. Hunt has supported.<sup>25</sup> The issue is important to this study in the sense of



understanding the reactions from the host community to their Irish neighbors due to contemporary perceptions of the Irish taking jobs and lowering wages.

The perceptions of the Victorian elite towards the poor and working classes in nineteenth century Britain progressed through three broad periods that roughly correspond to the Great Famine periodisation outlined above. In the early part of the century the emphasis was upon a propensity towards self help, thrift, denial, industry, frugality, sobriety and strength of character (or the lack of these) as being the defining indices of poverty; it was the poor who were responsible for their condition. By the middle of the century the consensus of blame shifted to the physical environment of the urban slum. The decrepit conditions of the cities were seen as the causation of the moral and physical deterioration of the poor with much campaigning for its amelioration. Towards the latter part of the century the argument shifted again to the underlying causes of poverty such as distribution of wealth and its effects upon the physical environment as well as other socio-economic questions. Gertrude Himmelfarb argues the old relaxed attitude of the British moral economy was replaced by a more severe positivistic and didactic judgement, symbolised by the introduction of the 1834 Poor Law marginalising the poor to the edges of society by condemnation of their moral, social and physical characters.<sup>26</sup> In relation to the poor Irish, however, Himmelfarb's original period seemed to last the century. The Irish national, religious and ethnic character was seen as responsible for the condition of the poor Irish in many contemporary eyes.

The flow of Irish migration to Britain between 1800 and 1860 along with the fundamental nineteenth century economic shift from land to capital that resulted in the growth of the cities exposed many weaknesses in public administration which were slow to accommodate the new realities of urban life. Problems of housing, medicine, water supply and sewage disposal, plus the privations of unregulated work on environmental conditions resulted in a linkage, in contemporary middle class Victorian eyes, of the rise in the highly visible immigrant Irish poor and the squalid conditions many of them inhabited.<sup>27</sup> Wherever the new emigrants clustered (as is common with many migrant groups, particularly if they are migrating from a poor rural sending society) many took the cheapest and lowliest dwellings in which to establish themselves. One notorious example of Irish settlement in London was the Saint Giles “Rookery”. In a small area lived some 6,000 adults and between 3,000 and 4,000 children in 1816.<sup>28</sup> A post-Great Famine description depicted the decrepitude and infamy of the area:

“Rows of crumbling houses flanked by courts and alleys, cul-de-sacs etc. in the very densest part of which the wretchedness of London took shelter...Squalid children, haggard men with long uncombed hair, in rags with the short pipe in their mouths, many speaking Irish, women without shoes or stockings - a babe at the breast with a single garment, confined at the waist with a bit of string; wolfish looking dogs; decaying vegetables strewing the pavement, low public houses, linen hanging across the street to dry....in one house a hundred persons have been known to sleep on a given night.”<sup>29</sup>



This experience and reflection of residence was repeated all over the poorest districts of British cities<sup>30</sup> and Birmingham was no exception. However, the relationship between this preoccupation with lurid Dickensian descriptions of the Irish “areas” and the reality of the groups lived experience is of interest to this study. The formation and uses of ethnicised residential stereotypes and their relationship to the discursive sense of what being “Irish” meant in the public discourse will be explored.

The demographic correlation of the distressed immigrant Irish with poor housing and insanitary conditions led to an association between the newly arrived Irish and the polluted environment of the expanding urban landscape. The lifestyle, diet and domestic economy of Irish migrant settlers were held to be directly responsible for overcrowding, fever<sup>31</sup> and misery. However, this was also the condition of many native urban peoples in Britain. Conditions were bad before the Irish arrived and the state of towns and cities - expanding exponentially in this period - were causing anxiety in the 1820s and 1830s before Irish immigration reached its peak.<sup>32</sup>

The study utilises certain theoretical tools to conceptualise the role of the “primary definers” who formulated opinions and policies towards the Irish within nineteenth century society, chief among these being the concept of hegemony as advanced by Gramsci. This conception is important in its theoretical approach to the construction of a national anti-groups to define and delimit primary national configurations in order to “shore up” bourgeois society under threat at a time of rapid economic, social and political change. The process is one by which those classes that control the economy also regulate the means of

ideological and cultural production to engineer societal consensus to protect their economic, cultural and political ascendancy. Fundamentally, Gramsci's theory of the hegemonic control of society by the bourgeoisie utilises ideas of coercion and consent working together to produce specific structural and social relations to entrench and reproduce the status quo or guide and force society into a new hegemony. "Hegemony is a relation not of domination by means of force, but consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organisation of consent."<sup>33</sup>

Consent is engineered by a class creating and maintaining a system of alliances by means of political and ideological struggle. Importantly, these alliances have to be cross class to appeal to the widest span of the population. Maintenance is achieved by the ascendant class when under threat via Gramsci's concept of passive revolution; that is the manipulation of the levers of state to reorganise society along certain lines to under cut the threat.<sup>34</sup> To understand the concept of hegemony we have to explore the relation between ideology and its effects on lived social practices, the realm of "common sense" or the uncritical acceptance of certain social and ideological assumptions/configurations engineered by "civil society" - the institutions of education, church, media, etc. that are completely or largely under the control of the ascendant class.<sup>35</sup> All these agencies became areas of contestation in nineteenth century Britain in relation to the Irish. As hegemony is never complete, it is an ongoing project of justification and mystification to keep the changing forces of society in check. This process becomes most visible when the ruling hegemony is under greatest threat or in an "organic crisis" as Gramsci describes it. These deep crises produce new structures and ideologies to maintain the hegemony.<sup>36</sup> Gramsci also notes that hegemony has a "national-popular" dimension that facilitates the cross class expansion of hegemony.<sup>37</sup> By appealing to nation as an imagined political and social community, the hegemony of the



ruling class can be expanded to the perimeter of the geographical/political congruency of the nation state. The period beginning in the 1830s through to the late 1870s in Britain was one of enormous economic, political, cultural and structural change nationally. The overall growth of the economy was fractured by cyclical booms and slumps, population and urban centers grew massively placing great strains on civil and national administration, migration rates reached unprecedented levels, revolutions abroad and working class political movements at home caused anxiety within the ascendant classes. The influx of mostly low class, Catholic, Irish migrants, many politicized by their experiences in Ireland, competing for jobs, housing and poor relief, lead to yet more assaults - real and imagined - upon the social, religious and political hegemony as far as the host nation was concerned. The threat of a politicized, anti-imperialist, working class, Catholic group at the centre of the English working class, was an internal and external challenge to British imperialism and the Protestant ascendancy. To help muster the native working class into supporting British nationalism rather than class based identities cutting across national lines, the patriot-bourgeois classes, whether consciously or otherwise, recognised the need to define a British political and ideological identity. The Irish - and in working class terms especially the poor Catholic Irish - provided the necessary internal and external poles of opposition to the formation of the British ideal type.<sup>38</sup> The Irish were perfectly placed historically, economically, ideologically, politically, spiritually, ethnically, and morally as the antithesis to “the free born Englishman”.

As has been noted, the Irish were spread throughout Britain involved in all stratas of the economy. However, their most visible element settled in distinctive areas where they were observable by the “primary definers” of the establishment. These were those

who were respected, listened to, had primary access to the great and the good as well as the rest of the population via the media and membership of government agencies, committees and published works. The attention of numerous commissions towards the conditions of the large towns and local commentators' observations were parts of a wider surveillance of the working classes who were conceived as a threat to the nation and society.<sup>39</sup> As such they held within their power the gift of contextual construction of public opinion in the sense of formulating and promulgating explanations, assumptions, meanings, stereotypes, prejudices, etc. so that notions of what the Irish are, were, were not, what they did, what they did not do, what they could be or could not be etc. were formed. For instance, instrumental in setting the tone for the hegemonic representation and diffusing of the Irish "ghetto" stereotype was Dr. James Phillips Kay's 1832 pamphlet, "The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester". This graphically descriptive work became a seminal influence on contemporary commentators, creating something of a sensation and becoming a bestseller. Kay's work profoundly influenced popular and governmental attitudes towards Britain's urban working class. Subsequent commentators were to use his perceptions upon the Irish without understanding the context or motivation of his work.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Kay's tone was highly emotive and the implicit causal linkage between urban squalor and a subordinate strata of humanity appealed to contemporary paranoia surrounding the "Condition of England" question which was a reflection of the political, moral and economic stresses engendered within the success of the imperial, political, urban and economic revolutions of Victorian Britain. This contemporary anxiety was the fear of moral turpitude within the working classes rising up to swallow the great institutions of civilization, i.e. church, monarchy, parliament and property, a specter that haunted Victorian Britain at that time and was consistent with a perception of the threat from the



lower classes that amongst other constructions led to a biololgisation of the “dangerous classes” in a discursive hegemonic articulation that had the effect of de-legitimising working class culture and increasing surveillance and social control of their actions/lives.<sup>41</sup>

The resources of Kay and others, mediated by the events and exigencies of the times have been the inheritance of contemporary scholars who focus on the worst cases of urban deprivation, the most dramatic incidents and worst forms of hostility exhibited in the nineteenth century. This unwittingly gives credence to a distorted perception and indeed lends substance to anti-Irish prejudice.<sup>42</sup> So, within this context of class anxiety and prejudice, much of the work regarding the Irish in nineteenth century Britain must be seen to be skewed towards the lower classes. Without detailed work upon Irish integration in to the class structure, a full picture of Anglo-Irish integration and relations in the Victorian period remains blurred and the work offers some new evidence to counter the discursive “common sense” notion that the Irish were all poor in nineteenth century Britain. There is evidence that the Irish were not all poverty stricken and certainly some improved their position as the century progressed. The surveys by Hugh Heinrick and John Denvir at the end of the century both point to an improving material condition in some towns, especially in London and the Midlands.<sup>43</sup> However, this said, although not a thorough representation, the experience of Irish immigrants to Britain within the lower classes was not an uncommon one, being over-represented at the bottom of society, the Irish, along with a large majority of the indigenous working class, experienced much privation throughout the nineteenth century. Poverty indeed was the dynamo of Irish emigration in the Victorian epoch, many finding themselves within the metropolises of Britain - the very nation blamed by

an untold number for their “exile”. Many of those that came to settle in Britain clustered within the lowliest and most decrepit areas of the Victorian City. From the tenements and Rookeries of London to the courts and cellars of Manchester many of the immigrant Irish experienced material and social poverty. Studies such as Pauline Millward’s in Stockport delineate an Irish community socially and economically segregated from their English neighbours whereas Francis Finnegan and Lynn Hollen Lees point to the low class areas inhabited being the vehicles of exclusion as much as the Irish themselves pointing to the importance of class in the formation of community visibility.<sup>44</sup> John Herson has shown that the Irish in Stafford were dispersed throughout the town.<sup>45</sup> David Fitzpatrick argues that the Irish did not cluster in ghettos, an idea that was created as much by social and historical demographers than by any reality. Colin Pooley argues that the clustering in certain districts was by no means an ethnically pure process with immigrants sectioned off from the host population supporting Fitzpatrick’s argument. The Irish lived cheek and jowl with their English neighbours of the same class.<sup>46</sup> MacRaild on the other hand indicates the importance of the economic context in determining residence patterns in Cumbria as well as ethnic allegiances and the supply of suitable accommodation. He also points out the constructed nature of the Irish “ghetto” within the English imagination.<sup>47</sup> John Belchem has argued that the complex cultural and political life of the Irish in Liverpool needs to be “rescued from historical caricature and stigma” citing the significant contribution to Irish Liverpool provided by middle class Irish. He points out how the Catholic middle class Irish and their descendants “took exclusive command of Irish nationalism and ‘Irishness’”. The associational networks created around secret societies and political movements such as Ribbonism demonstrates for Belchem the salience of middle class activity and political contributions to the Irish story in

nineteenth century Britain.<sup>48</sup> This said, there is no doubt that certain impoverished areas, streets and courts were populated by a distinctly Irish population, but to describe them as ghettos is incorrect. Steven Fielding commenting on Manchester notes that the Irish of the Great Famine were more visibly clustered than their descendants and that class was the important factor in this process.

Fielding illustrates the ghetto point thus.

“If Irish Catholics found themselves in a ghetto it was not due to nationality or religion but because of their poverty. Whatever the merits of the term for the 1840s, ‘ghettoization’ seems a wholly inappropriate way to describe the residential and occupational distribution of Manchester’s Irish Catholics by the 1880s.”<sup>49</sup>

Recently Mary Hickman has also challenged the whole concept of the integrationist/assimilationist model arguing that it problematises the Irish as a group by focusing upon the immigrant instead of the context of the receiving society and its nationalist articulation. For Hickman, this approach underplays at best the effects of a cross-class nationalist British racism upon migrant Irish experience within the Victorian city, as well as ignoring the role of the British state. Hickman has called for a new historiography that problematises the nation state and locates the experiences and problems of Irish migrants and their descendants within the context of the social relations of the period - a period of rapid change and structural dislocation as has been noted. Hickman also points out the need to include the diasporic connections of the



Irish community and how they affected perceptions and experiences of the Irish migrant.<sup>50</sup> Hickman has argued for an alternative historiography for the Irish in Britain. Her inherently structuralist thesis disputes the segregationist/assimilationist model that characterises much of the literature, pointing out that the discourse focuses on the group itself and its relative “successes” or “failures” in relation to the host state/society without problematising the role that the receiving society poses to the migrant. Her critique censures the “inherent empiricism” of most historiography that produces a systematic exceptionalism from the sources, professional knowledge of which becomes a “substitute for thought”. Hickman calls for a new approach that systematises the various factors of “race”, ethnicity, class, religion, politics etc. to provide a new analysis of how Irish experiences in Britain were configured in relation to these factors. She is very critical of the assimilation model arguing that it disengages migrants from the structural factors such as class and access to employment, undervalues the role of “race” and ethnicity in determining class position and ignores the role the Irish played in the construction of a cross-class racist British nationalism. The role of the state is also transparent in much of the historiography according to Hickman, the particular articulation of which structures the institutional and cultural context of the receiving society. For Hickman, the Irish in Britain arrived at a crucial time of the British state's nation building project, a project that was concerned with constructing an idea of an homogenised and centralised state and culture. Irish Catholic peasants became within this context the defining “Other” from which a cross class “national-racial unit” was constructed, i.e. Englishness/Britishness. This unit was defined by Protestantism and the hegemonic inculcation of “respectability”, i.e. bourgeois values, into the working classes. Thus the new nineteenth century institutions of police, education, mass media etc. were involved in a nation building project part of which was the construction of a



new political subject and thereby the state reconstructed its self and its hegemony. The Irish were problematised within this project and for Hickman the focus of attention for historians should be upon this historical context rather than the relative success or otherwise of Irish migrants within the project which has been the legacy of the current historiography.<sup>51</sup> If it is posited that ethnic/national groups consist of classifications of ascription and identificatory credentials that are created by the actors themselves and that all ethnic or national constructions are a process of generation and maintenance of boundaries as Fredrick Barth proposes, it is the ethnic boundary that defines the group and not the culture it encloses. Therefore, for a boundary to be defined and maintained the ethnic group or nation needs a definition of where the “sameness” of their group ends and significant difference starts. It is here that the importance of a strong stereotypes are needed for the ethnic/national group to exist. All nations needing a “Them” to define an “Us” by.<sup>52</sup>

The extreme nastiness of the Victorian slum that the Irish immigrant was so readily identified with, was a constant theme of Victorian social and sanitary reformers. Close investigation shows that public authorities and police were more emphatic in their use and abuse of their discretionary powers when dealing with criminals as part of the dynamic surrounding the “Condition of England Question”. The neutrality of the criminal justice system is a key point in this position as it must be demonstrated that the system was partial in its treatment of these classes of subject. For instance, T.H.S. Escott writing in 1879 noted in regard to the slum areas of Liverpool that,

“The repressive measures enforced by the Liverpool Magistrates are exceptionally severe, and the police often would apprehend upon charges that would seem trivial elsewhere.”<sup>53</sup>

This pattern is also observable in Birmingham where magistrates and Poor Law officers interpreted the law partially in regard to issues of poor removal of Irish migrants to Ireland. The Irish in Britain were over represented in the petty crime statistics, and were three times more prone to prosecution and five times as likely to be convicted, although these are probably under estimates due to problems of defining “Irish” as born in Ireland or second/third generation of Irish parents.<sup>54</sup> Also, the figures need to be qualified by the concentration of Irish criminality in petty offenses and the concentration of police resources on the areas most likely to be occupied by Irish immigrants. The area of disorderly behavior that was associated with the Irish immigrant was thus confirmed and reinforced by heavy surveillance and a number of other factors. Police prejudice towards the Irish has been noted in Birmingham, Coventry, Bradford, and Myrthyr Tydfil in this period. A partial explanation points to the fact that 14 out of 47 chief constables were ex Royal Irish Constabulary between 1839 and 1880 with a high proportion of Irish recruits from the Protestant community in forces such as Manchester.<sup>55</sup> The prejudice was also observable in sentencing. Writing in 1892, in regard to the aftermath of an outbreak of violence in London in 1768 between (mainly Irish) coal-heavers and sailors, John Denvir noted that:

“This happened about one hundred and twenty years ago, but the incident bears a strong family resemblance to what has occurred in

the present generation in English towns, where the Irish were brutally treated, and had their homes and churches gutted. Yet, in the legal proceedings that followed, they often received the severest punishment.”<sup>56</sup>

Pauline Millward has noted a disparity in sentencing policy towards the immigrants in the aftermath of the anti-Irish riots in Stockport in 1852. Of those arrested, ten English and ten Irish were sent for trial. Of this number all the Irish were convicted and only three of the English.<sup>57</sup> She concludes that the protestations of “No Popery” and religious fanaticism had a social purpose linked to the economic dislocation of the period and the need for local and national political leaders to promote anti-Catholicism for political gains.<sup>58</sup> For instance, in Liverpool and Glasgow the Conservative party joined forces with the Orange Lodge to exploit sectarian divisions post 1830.<sup>59</sup> Likewise Anglicans exploited sectarian division in regard to immigrant Irish labour in order to successfully appeal to a wider constituency in Liverpool and Lancashire in the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>60</sup> These tendencies are observable in the issues and methods pursued by anti-Catholic elements in Birmingham who had close links to political activists locally and nationally as well as the sentencing of the Irish prosecuted in the aftermath of the Murphy Riots in Birmingham in 1867.

Roger Swift notes a number of reasons for the clustering of Irish wrong doing within petty criminality. He points to the brutalizing and poverty stricken urban environment as a casual factor in criminality. Swift’s argument notes that the Victorian attitude towards the Irish and criminality was negative and disproportionate in the acquisition



of blame. He states that this was connected to their class position and anti-Irish prejudice stemming from the rural background of the immigrant and stereotypes of the “Wild Irish” - anti-social behavior reinforcing perceptions and molding criminal justice strategies. Importantly, Swift makes the point that the over representation in criminal statistics has to be understood in part by the relation of the urban Irish immigrant to the development of nineteenth century policing. Municipal, county and borough police acts in 1835, 1836 and 1839 respectively - fitting the Gramscian and Balibar theses neatly - increased surveillance of working class districts where the Irish were over represented. The targeting of street crime, drunken behavior, vagrancy, lodging houses and rowdy leisure activities increased the frequency of police/Irish association due to the role and mandate of the criminal justice system.<sup>61</sup> Contemporary English working class districts were not as heavily monitored as the Irish areas. Swift attributes this to the resentment of the host population towards the “alien” habits, religion and politics of the Irish and for the alleged cheapness of their labour as has been mentioned. The need to justify the rate levy that paid for policing is also commented on by Swift. The more criminals apprehended the better the argument for more resources at a crucial period in the development of the constabulary.<sup>62</sup> Surveillance took other forms and it can be demonstrated in Birmingham that the significant focus of local and national government agencies, as well as police surveillance, delineated certain areas and trades such as lodging house proprietorship as “Irish” and therefore of particular concern. The determinants that focused middle class and governmental anxiety on these areas were ethnicity through ethnic clustering, class via the occupancy being predominantly very poor, and religion i.e. Catholic and close to Catholic institutions active in the areas. The inhabitants’ relationship to the economy, morality and political threat reinforced this perception.



After poverty and its axiomatic attachment of class position, the next criteria of difference noted by commentators and historians in regard to the Irish in Victorian Britain was the problem of Irish nationalism. The tradition of defiance and rebellion against the colonial domination of Ireland by the natives and their reputation as a disorderly and violent population gave plenty of ideological and material ammunition to conservative elements within the British establishment and beyond in the justification of anti-Irish prejudice. The resistance to British imperialism (and the dialogue and inspiration this presented to other nationalist movements) conferred by the Young Ireland Movement of the late 1840s, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Fenian rising of the 1860s, the Home Rule Movement of the late nineteenth century (not to mention the historical and ongoing struggles in Ireland and the rest of the diaspora) added up to a rich seam of rhetorical material for the advocates of Irish nationalism or anti-Irish rhetoric and action to mine. On a constitutional level Irish MPs were agitating for repeal of the Act of Union from 1829 onwards, (tactics of which were copied by the Birmingham Political Union) causing severe disruption of parliamentary process, inflicting real damage on the Tories in 1846 and helping destroy the Liberal Party in 1886. On the other hand, as far as English radicals were concerned, the position of the Irish within working class culture and their role within political struggle was to be welcomed and many supported Irish causes. The role of the Irish in Chartism is still an area of historical debate with the high profile roles of Irish men such as Fergus O'Connor and Bronterre O'Brien within its leadership. John Belchem and Dorothy Thompson both argue that there was a great deal of co-operation between Irish immigrants and the Chartists while James Treble points to the role of the Catholic Church in preventing full engagement by Irish immigrants within the movement.<sup>63</sup> The

assumption was that the Irish were revolutionary in character and as such dangerous, although the truth of this is arguable. The tradition of revolutionary struggle in Britain is an area in need of further study. Those studies that have documented this tradition include K.R.M. Short on Irish American Fenians in Britain and Quinlivan and Rose who have written about the Fenian “Manchester Martyrs”, the Clerkenwell bomb and Chester raid.<sup>64</sup> Both works give a traditional interpretation of Fenian uprisings as part of an unbroken nationalist tradition to alter Ireland’s relationship with Britain. John Newsinger offers a different interpretation that highlights the revolutionary character of the movement and disavows the attempts by revisionist historians such as R.V. Comerford to underplay the rebellion and overstate the social aspect of Fenian politics to the detriment of their revolutionary character.<sup>65</sup> Clearly the British public were hostile too much of their Irish neighbours deviance on matters of nation and empire as was demonstrated by their reaction to the Fenian agitation, a reaction that was exploited by elements within the conservative establishment in Birmingham and its region. In turn the majority of Irish immigrants were sympathetic to the broadly nationalist aims of the rebels, a sympathy that potentially de-legitimised any meaningful contribution by them to British politics for most of the century up until the Second Reform Act of 1868 and then the Liberal Party’s acceptance of Home Rule in 1886. From here on in the Irish nationalist project was no longer considered to be an ultimately dangerous and maverick policy by a majority of the establishment and therefore the threat to nation/state was mitigated somewhat.<sup>66</sup>

On the local level, Belchem’s work on the Irish middle class political organisations in Liverpool has already been mentioned. Frances Finnegan has pointed out that the Irish community in York was politically indifferent, suggesting the high turnover of poor

illiterate Gaelic speaking immigrants as a reason for political disengagement. Where the Irish were involved in politics in York it was in nationalist secret societies that were the antithesis of local political activity and this seems to be also the case in Birmingham.<sup>67</sup> Lynn Lees on the other hand presents a picture of the more economically and socially integrated London Irish engaging with the political system in Britain.<sup>68</sup> MacRaild records the tri-partite allegiances to Irish nationalism in Cumbria with Irish Catholics for and against Irish independence as well as the well organised unionist Orange faction of Irish Protestants.<sup>69</sup> The contested nature of Irish political allegiance was obviously conditional on local demographic, political and economic contexts that in turn affected the political engagement of the Irish. The influence of the Catholic Church on politics in the sense of its negative stance on revolutionary organisations while at the same time including of individual pro-Irish nationalist priests and sympathy from some of the hierarchy, are also factors to be considered.

The assertion that the Irish in nineteenth century Britain were segregated due to religion is an important issue. Religion is a critical determinant in the relations between all immigrants and their host communities. The degree of engagement with religion by the Irish community is still a matter of doubt. David Miller suggests that at least 50% of the immigrant Catholics were not regular attendees of religious services<sup>70</sup> and Gerard Connolly has questioned the axiomatic association between Irish and Catholic.<sup>71</sup> Sheridan Gilley has noted the way in which Catholicism was adapted on the ground to accommodate the new worshipers, that is they defined it to some extent an assertion that was supported by Ralph Samuel.<sup>72</sup> All this suggests that the role of the Catholic Church in the lives of the Irish immigrant is an important area of debate. This study will strive to determine how effective the religion of the Irish was in preventing



engagement with the host population by the founding of alternative social institutions such as schools and welfare establishments as well as providing a pole of identity for the Irish in Birmingham within the context of long-standing anti-Catholicism in Britain and its role as an internal and external rallying point in the nation building project of the Victorian era.

From the late 1790s onwards Britain underwent a Protestant evangelical revival that reached its apogee during the late 1850s. Evangelicals dominated Irish Protestantism and the movement came to be the prevailing form of popular Protestant worship within the land. The reforming nature of the movement and its belief in progressive education and social philanthropy was influential in the introduction of many of the values that are now sometimes referred to as “Victorian”. Their influence upon state and nation was profound playing a role in the great reform movements of the century such as the abolition of slavery, the introduction of the Factory Acts, public health measures and much more. However, the downside of popular Protestantism was its hostility to Roman Catholicism. Throughout the century “No-Popery” was a significant force that was stimulated by events such as Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Tractarian Controversy in the 1830s-40s, the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in the 1850s, disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 and many other low level disputes both local and national. Another factor in the rise of anti-Catholicism was the visible presence of Catholic Irish immigrants throughout the period and the real or imagined threat that they posed to employment prospects, the Protestant Church, state, and nation. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants led to serious clashes throughout the century, most notably from evangelist rabble rousers such as Birmingham’s own William Murphy who instigated mass disturbances throughout Britain from 1867 to 1871.

It can be argued that the Reformation in England was the defining epoch in the formation of English identity, and the development of the British nationalist project coinciding as it did with the consolidation of the geographically sovereign modern state that originated in 1066. Internally the war of the Reformation was as much a project to centralize the state into a unitary kingdom as a religious revolution. This project necessitated the unification of Ireland and Wales to England to secure resources and *defacto* as well as *dejure* sovereignty within the Britain Isles to negate potential counter-revolution. The process of centralisation destroyed the feudal system to a great extent resulting by the time of the Civil War in a economic underpinning to the identification of “the free born Englishman” against the “despotic” Roman Catholic feudalised system. The securing of parliamentary sovereignty and Protestantism in the new constitution paved the way for the “Glorious Revolution” which confirmed an English nationalist identification (as well as the state) as Protestant, and the role played by anti-Catholicism was fundamental in this process.<sup>73</sup> Theologians and radical politicians from both sides of the rationalist/religious debate accepted the role of Protestantism as the touchstone of national identity. The Protestant Church saw the struggle of the Reformation, Civil War and Glorious Revolution as patriotic proof that Protestantism was the source of English greatness. Radicals on the other hand, saw popish despotism as anti-rationalist and manipulatory and therefore to be disabused, a Protestant based constitutional polity being essentially more desirable than a mystic based theocracy.<sup>74</sup> Linda Colley has written about the formation of “Britishness” in the sixteenth and seventeenth century as being a politically motivated project to mobilize the English and the Scottish, via the Act of Union in 1707, into a national unit to combat the threat from Catholic France. The percipience of an autocratic Catholic

France was equated as the antithesis of freedom loving British tolerance (signified politically and in law by the Magna Carta, The Reformation, English Civil War, Glorious Revolution etc.), promulgated by the hegemonic institutional conduits of the state and media. Colley's argument that this invention of a national identity defined by Protestantism and conflict is only undermined by her refusal to accept the influence of the Catholic Irish in her analysis where they do not fit.<sup>75</sup> Her contention that Ireland's relations to the formation of British Identity was cut off by the sea and English prejudices, is an evasion of the deep and complex relationships between the two islands from Norman times to the present day. Hickman notes that:

“This exclusion neglects consideration of the extent to which Catholic Ireland was the significant “Other” of emerging Britishness; a colonized inferior “Other”. London treated Ireland as a colony, the metropolitan stance was significantly different towards Scotland and Wales.”<sup>76</sup>

This invention of this idea of Britishness - ideologically concomitant to the invention of Protestant England - had an internal part which consisted of the fear of Catholic reinvention through “Popery” at home and an external aspect of the neighboring Irish which in effect helped secure the internally imagined British/Protestant community together. It is therefore arguable that the articulation of the political necessity to centralize the state and the hegemonic Protestantisation of the nation building project were concomitant, leading to a new argot and ritual of exclusion centered around the Irish Catholic “Other”.



Mary Hickman points out that the Catholic school system was involved in an hegemonic incorporationist strategy towards the Irish to denationalise them and mould the immigrant and offspring into a loyal and respectable part of the British working class while re-enforcing their Catholic faith and preventing “leakage” to other creeds. She notes that the state and Church were seen as mutually supporting in the attempt to imagine and incarnate a new “British” identity, thus demonstrating the hegemonic nation building project that Colley has proposed. Hickman also pointed to the role of politics and the Conservative Party in particular in manipulating anti-Catholicism and anti-Irish racism in order to help cement the nationalist discourse among the masses in an anti-revolutionary and xenophobic modulation that had an emotional appeal across the classes and political spectrum.<sup>77</sup> Best notes that Catholic Emancipation and disestablishment of the Irish Protestant Church united Protestants in England at the perceived “loss” of Ireland and furthermore:

“...now that ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ was no longer constitutionally guaranteed over there [Ireland], it became necessary for keen Protestants - and politically profitable for keen Tories - to keep the fires of the true faith well stoked beneath a widening range of political public.”<sup>78</sup>

The actions of anti-Catholic groups in Birmingham during the nineteenth century support this assertion completely as will be demonstrated. But firstly we must examine the patterns of settlement of the migrant Irish in Birmingham. An important issue to be

pursued here is how the sources have lead historians and others to make certain assumptions about where the Irish were perceived to be living rather than where they actually were settled and how this was shaped by ideas of poverty, religion and prejudice.

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## Chapter 1 Endnotes.

<sup>1</sup> Among the general works on the Irish in nineteenth century Britain are Clapham, J. H., "Irish Immigration to Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century", Bulletin of the International Committee of Historical Sciences, Vol. 5, 1933; Davis, G., The Irish in Britain, 1813-1914, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1991; Denvir, J., The Irish in Britain from the Earliest times to the Fall and Death of Parnell, Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, Dublin, 1892; Fielding, S., Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England 1880-1938, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1993; Fitzpatrick, D., "Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century", Irish Historical Studies, Vol. 22, 1980; Heinrick, H., (Edited by O'Day, A.), A Survey of the Irish In England 1872, The Hambledon Press, London, 1990; Holmes, C., John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971, Macmillan, London, 1988; Jackson, J. A., The Irish in Britain, Routledge and Keegan Paul, London, 1963; MacRaild, D., Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922, Macmillan, London, 1999; O'Connor, K., The Irish in Britain, Torc, Dublin, 1974; O'Tauthaigh, M. A. G., "The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Vol. 31, 1982; Swift, R., and Gilley, S., (eds.), The Irish in the Victorian City, Croom Helm, London, 1985; Swift, R., and Gilley, S., (eds.), The Irish in Britain 1815-1939, Pinter, London, 1989. Other more localised studies include Finnegan,

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F., Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840 -1875, Cork University Press, Cork, 1982; Handley, J. E., The Irish in Scotland 1798 - 1845, Cork University Press, Cork, 1943; Handley, J. E., The Irish in Modern Scotland, Cork University Press; Cork, 1947; Herson, J., Why the Irish Went to Stafford: A Case Study of Irish Settlement in England 1830-1871, Liverpool Papers in Social Studies, No.1, April 1988; Lees, L. H., Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London, Ithaca, London, 1979; Lowe, W. J., The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working Class Community, Peter Lang, New York, 1989; MacRaild, D., Culture Conflict and Migration: The Irish in Victorian Cumbria, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1998; Swift, R., and Gilley, S., (eds.), The Irish in Victorian Britain: The Local Dimension, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1999. For a more exhaustive bibliography see Hartigan, M., and Hickman, M., The History of the Irish in Britain : A Bibliography, Irish in Britain History Centre, London, 1986, or the select bibliographies in Swift and Gilley, 1985, 1989 and 1999, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> See Denvir, op. cit.; Heinrick, op. cit.; Handley, 1943 and 1947, op. cit.; Jackson, op. cit.; MacRaild, 1998, op. cit.; Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> An observer in Birmingham noted that the Irish population was constantly changing as early as 1828. Darwall, J., "Observations on the Medical Topography of Birmingham and the Health of the Inhabitants", Midland and Surgical Reporter and Topographical and Statistical Journal, Vol. 1, 1828-9, pp.108-111.



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<sup>4</sup> The process of chain migration of second generation Irish from Birmingham to the United States is mentioned in Denvir, op. cit., p.259. Samuel also notes that the priest's house of St. Peter's Birmingham was used by the Irish to receive mail from America, Australia and other foreign destinations. Samuel, R., "The Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Poor", Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., p.276.

<sup>5</sup> Chinn complains that he could not find all the officially claimed Birmingham Irish in the 1851 census returns. He admits he must have missed some Irish (as well as omitting Edgebaston from his survey), but this still does not explain a discrepancy of nearly 1300. Chinn, C., "Sturdy Catholic Emigrants': The Irish in Early Victorian Birmingham", in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., p.58.

<sup>6</sup> The Special Correspondent of The Nation pointed out in 1856 how many Irishmen in the Birmingham area were so fearful of being recognised as such that they would go as far as to change their names. Examples include O'Hara to Johnson and Maguire to Jones. This reticence to admit one's Irish ethnicity probably extended to official surveillance. The reasons that the Irish resorted to this form of forced assimilation and ethnic suicide was the threat of violence from their English neighbours. The Nation, 7 June 1856.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, op. cit.; Fielding, op. cit.; Holmes, op. cit.; Davis, op. cit.; O'Connor, op. cit., and MacRaild, 1999, op. cit., are exceptions dealing as they do with the Irish immigrant in the late nineteenth through to the twentieth centuries.

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<sup>8</sup> "Census of Great Britain 1841", British Parliamentary Papers, Population Vol. 3, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1971, pp.84-5; "Census of Great Britain, 1851", British Parliamentary Papers, Population Vol. 8, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.cclxxxvii; "Census of England and Wales, 1871", British Parliamentary Papers, Population Vol.18, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.1; Census of England and Wales, General Report 1931, HMSO, London, 1950, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> See Jackson, op. cit., pp.1-5; Handley, op. cit., 1947, p.80.

<sup>10</sup> To some commentators the Malthusian argument justified a racial Celtic reading of the Famine which was seen as a demonstration of Celtic\Catholic proclivity towards wastefulness, poor foresight and administration. See Curtis, L., Nothing But the Same Old Story, Information on Ireland Publication, London, 1984, p.10; Jones, W. R., "England Against the Celtic Fringe: A Study in Cultural Stereotypes", Journal of World History, Vol. 13, 1971, pp.161-2.

<sup>11</sup> Mokyr, J., Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical Study of the Irish Economy 1800- 1850, Allen & Unwin, London, 1983; O'Grada, C., "Some Aspects of Nineteenth Century Irish Emigration", in Cullen, M., and Smout, T. C., (eds.), Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History, 1600-1900, J. Donald, Edinburgh, 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Mayhew pointed out that the least affluent Irish moved to London in the post Great Famine period, many of the more affluent farmers moving to the USA. Turton, J.,

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"Mayhew's Irish: The Irish Poor in Mid-Nineteenth Century London", in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., p.126; Lees, op. cit., pp.40-1.

<sup>13</sup> Cousens, S. H., "Emigration and Demographic Change in Ireland 1851-1861", Economic History Review, Vol. 14, 1961-2, pp.275-285.

<sup>14</sup> Hatton, T. J., and Williamson, J. G., "After the Famine: Emigration From Ireland 1850-1913", Journal of Economic History, Vol.53, 1993, pp.575-98.

<sup>15</sup> Swift, R., "The Histography of the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain", in O'Sullivan, P., (ed.), The Irish in the New Communities: The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity, Vol. 2., Leicester University Press, London, 1992, pp.54-5.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, K. A., Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985, pp.267-80.

<sup>17</sup> O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., p.152.

<sup>18</sup> Swift, R., The Irish in Britain 1815-1914, The Historical Association, London, 1990, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.145; Briggs, A., "Social History Since 1815", in Pugh, R. B., (ed.), The Victorian History of the Counties of England: Warwickshire, The University of London Institute of Historical Research, London, 1964, p.223.



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<sup>20</sup> Redford, A., Labour Migration in England 1800-1850, University of Manchester, London, 1926,  
p.130.

<sup>21</sup> Swift, 1990, op. cit., p.16; Jackson, op. cit., pp.72-95.

<sup>22</sup> Letford L., Pooley C. G., "Irish Women in Liverpool", in O'Sullivan P., Irish Women and Irish Migration: The Irish World Wide, History, Heritage, Identity, Vol. 4., Leicester University Press, London, 1995, pp.100-4.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Redford, op. cit., p.137; Jackson, op. cit., pp.76-9.

<sup>24</sup> Gallagher, T., "A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool Before 1914" in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., pp.106-29.

<sup>25</sup> Williamson, J., "The Impact of the Irish on British Labour Markets During the Industrial Revolution", Journal of Economic History, Vol. 46, 1986, pp.693-720; Hunt, E. J., British Labour History 1815-1914, Longman, London, 1981, pp.158-9.

<sup>26</sup> Turton points out, however, that Himmelfarb may have misunderstood the contemporary usage of the term "character" in some instances, it referring to a form of reference for work rather than an innate quality of personality. Turton, op. cit., p.131; Himmelfarb, G., The Idea of Poverty, Knopf, London, 1984, pp.180-3.

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<sup>27</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.46.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.43.

<sup>29</sup> Gore, M., On the Dwellings of the Poor, London, 1851, Quoted in Jackson, ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jackson, ibid, p.42; Davis, op. cit., pp.51-82.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed the pathologised ethno-biological epithet "Irish fever" was a common one.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>33</sup> Simon, R., Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1982, p.21.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.26.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp.37-8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.42.

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<sup>38</sup> Barth, F., Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1969, pp.10-19.

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the masses were considered by some to be a “race apart” from the “decent” (i.e. middle class) Englishman. See Mason, P., Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts On Class And Race, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Busteed, M. A., Hodgson, R. I., "The Myth and Reality of Irish Migrants in Mid-Nineteenth Century Manchester, a Preliminary Study", in O'Sullivan P., (ed.), The Irish in the New Communities: The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity, Vol. 2., Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1992, p.29; MacRaild, 1999, op. cit., pp.156-60.

<sup>41</sup> This fear has been described in theoretical terms by Etienne Balibar who describes the process of racialising the working class as having a tendentious hegemonic stimulus connected to entrenching bourgeois notions of economy and society. Balibar, E. and Wallerstein, I., Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, Verso, London, 1991, pp.204-5.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., pp.149-174; Pooley, C., G., “Segregation or Integration? The Residential Experience of the Irish in Mid-Victorian Britain”, in Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., p.60; Jackson, op. cit., p.41; MacRaild, D., “Irish Immigration and the "Condition of England" Question: The Roots of an Histographical Tradition”, Immigrants and Minorities, Vol. 14, 1995, passim, and 1999, op. cit., pp.156-60.



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<sup>43</sup> Denvir, op. cit., pp.212; Heinrick, op. cit., pp.42-62.

<sup>44</sup> Finnegan, op. cit., p.25. Lees, op. cit., pp.55-87.

<sup>45</sup> Herson, op. cit., p.78.

<sup>46</sup> Fitzpatrick, D., "A Curious Middle Place: The Irish in Britain, 1871-1921"; Pooley, op. cit., both in Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., pp.10-60 and pp.60-84.

<sup>47</sup> MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., pp.27-59.

<sup>48</sup> Belchem, J., "Class Creed and Country: the Irish Middle Class in Victorian Liverpool", in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., pp. 190-211; Belchem, J., "Liverpool in the Year of Revolution: The Political and Associational Culture of the Irish Immigrant Community in 1848", in Belchem, J., (ed.), Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1992, pp.68-98.

<sup>49</sup> Fielding, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>50</sup> This diasporic point as well as the importance of the "Other" in the formation of British national identity echoes the work of Paul Gilroy. Gilroy, P., The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, Verso, London, 1993.

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<sup>51</sup> Hickman, M. J., "Alternative Historiographies of the Irish in Britain: A Critique of the Segregation/Assimilation Model" in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., pp.236-253.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, op. cit., pp.10-19.

<sup>53</sup> Best G.F.A., "Another Part of the Island: Some Scottish Perspectives" in Dyos H. J., and Wolff M., (eds.), The Victorian City: Images and Realities, Routledge, 1973, p.399.

<sup>54</sup> Swift, R., "Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain", in Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., p.165.

<sup>55</sup> 25% in 1845. Ibid, p.178.

<sup>56</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.78.

<sup>57</sup> Millward, P., "The Stockport Riots of 1852: A Study of Anti-Catholic and Anti-Irish Sentiment", in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., pp.207-224.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.220.

<sup>59</sup> Gallagher, op. cit., pp.106-29. This shows that the Conservative and Unionist party have an historical inclination to exploit the "race card" for electoral gain - Victorian utilisation pre-dating the Powellite counter hegemonic broadside on the post-war liberal consensus on immigration by some 138 years.

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<sup>60</sup> McLeod, H., Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain, Macmillan, London, 1984, pp.37-38.

<sup>61</sup> Swift, R., "Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain", Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., pp.176-7; Swift, R., "Crime and Ethnicity: The Irish in Early Victorian Wolverhampton", West Midland Studies, Vol. 13, 1980, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>63</sup> Belchem, J., "English Working-Class Radicalism and the Irish, 1850-1950" in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., pp.85-97; Thompson, D., "Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism Before 1850", in Epstein J., and Thompson, D., (eds.), The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working Class Radicalism, London, 1982, pp.120-51; Treble J., "The Attitude of the Roman Catholic Church Towards Trades Unionism in the North of England, 1833-1842", Northern History, Vol. 5, 1970, pp.227-47.

<sup>64</sup> Quinlivan, P. and Rose, P., The Fenians in England, 1865-1872, J. Calder, London, 1982; Short, K.R.M., The Dynamite War: Irish American Bombers in Victorian Britain, Macmillan, Dublin, 1979.

<sup>65</sup> Newsinger J., Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain, Pluto Press, London 1994; Comerford R. V., The Fenians in Context, Wolfhound, Dublin, 1985.



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<sup>66</sup> O'Tauthaigh, op. cit, pp.171-2.

<sup>67</sup> Finnegan, op. cit., p.164.

<sup>68</sup> Lees, op. cit., p.242.

<sup>69</sup> MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., p.99.

<sup>70</sup> Miller D. W., "Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine", Journal of Social History, Vol. 9, 1975, pp.81-98. This does not necessarily mean the non-church going Irish did not have any affiliation with or sympathy for the Catholic Church. They certainly reacted with vigor and in great numbers when their religion was under attack in Birmingham and elsewhere during the late 1860s.

<sup>71</sup> Connolly, G., "Irish and Catholic: Myth or Reality?" in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., pp.225-54.

<sup>72</sup> Gilley, S., "Vulgar Piety and the Brompton Oratory", Ibid, pp.255-66; Samuel, op. cit., pp.267-300.

<sup>73</sup> Hickman, M .J., Religion Class and Identity, Avebury, London, 1995, pp.29-31.

<sup>74</sup> Fielding, 1993, op. cit., p.6.

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<sup>75</sup> Colley, L., Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837, Yale University Press, London, 1992, pp.4-12.

<sup>76</sup> Hickman, 1995, op. cit., pp.34-5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp.44-6.

<sup>78</sup> Best, op. cit., p.139.

## **II: Settlement, Work and Prejudice.**

### **Chapter 2:**

#### **IRISH SETTLEMENT IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BIRMINGHAM.**

Between the years of 1821 and 1914 the nature of Britain's economy and society became increasingly metropolitan, a change of production and social organization without precedent. In 1801 only 20% of the population lived in towns with over 10,000 inhabitants, but by 1851 there were for the first time more people living in the urban centers than the countryside. By the year of Victoria's death, 75% of the population of Great Britain were recorded as urban by the census.<sup>1</sup> Victorian Britain became the world's first urbanized society. The scale and complexity of the towns and cities increased immensely along with their populations and associated problems of infrastructure, housing, health and hygiene. The expansion of the cities was closely linked to the industrialisation of Britain. The advantages that town and city production had over the countryside - accessibility to urbanized labour, communications, infrastructure - engendered a mass exodus from the countryside and beyond as the city economy expanded and drew in labour for the new industries and services. Migration from the countryside and beyond was a major component of the urban expansion in the early to mid phase of Victorian Britain. Crucially, this migration from countryside to town<sup>2</sup> affected the relationship between the home and workplace; domestic life and its association with the place of occupation and the working day changed radically to the advantage of the urban/capitalist economic configuration placing stresses on the new urban inhabitants in adjusting to the new way of living and working.



Although the physical form of the cities changed greatly, they were founded upon older social and geographic relations. The spatial distribution of the city; its central business district, plan of streets, shops and social geography, were established upon previous generations of organization and settlement - albeit expanded geographically. Also, the family based system of residence and decision making still predominated along with the economic strategy based on the pursuit of profit within a system of private ownership of property. This greatly influenced the distribution of goods, services and employment patterns. Perhaps the most significant changes in this period came in the developing role of local government and the political system.<sup>3</sup>

Communications such as roads canals, and crucially in nineteenth century Britain, the railways, were all essential for urban expansion and economic growth. The state of the living conditions and social life in the new urban centers led to great feats of public works by the Victorian patriarchs - in both the private, charity sector as well as the public - to establish the sustainability of the city as a centre of production. Irish immigrants and their descendants were involved in many of these endeavors. The Irish were an integral part of this urban revolution being well represented in all the urban and industrial centers of Britain.<sup>4</sup>

During the nineteenth century Birmingham was amongst the foremost industrial centers of the new era. Between 1801 and 1901 the population increased from 60,822 to 522,000 along with a concomitant increase in industry and geographic area.<sup>5</sup> Although Birmingham was among the more healthy of metropolitan cores relatively

speaking, the lack of planning and bye-laws exacerbated the pernicious effects of rapid development and led to a deleterious and crowded environment. Poor sanitation and housing, pollution, law and order, care of the elderly, sick and infirm, the orphan and the destitute, all became new problems for the urban centers with few precedents to learn from. With the doctrine of *laissez-faire* ascendant and a political system based on the parish and the manor, it is perhaps unsurprising that the wretched conditions of many of the nineteenth century cities lasted as long as they did. It was the intervention of Victorian paternalistic social and political reformers, progress in parliamentary and local government organization, powers and the instigation of methods of raising tax revenues to fund large public works that led to the prototype of the modern city as we know it today.

Birmingham was a typical Victorian town in many ways, but different in others. In terms of public health Birmingham suffered many of the problems of its contemporaries but was blessed with geographical advantages of drainage and water supply. However, as the city expanded throughout the nineteenth century, the deficiencies of the pre-Victorian infrastructure began to tell. Writing in the Report on the State of Birmingham and Other Towns in 1845, Robert A. Slaney<sup>6</sup> commented - in regard to the perilous state of the town's health housing and sanitation - that:

The crowded and neglected state of the dwellings of the poorer classes in populous places, productive of so much evil, and exercising so injurious an influence on the characters and conduct appears to have arisen from circumstances greatly within our control, and to be



mitigated, if not removed, by well considered regulations. The cause of this state of things appears to be the rapid increase in our town population within the present century, and the absence of any general rules as to the construction or casements of houses erected; and as to sewage, cleansing and the supply of water, as regards the poorer classes.<sup>7</sup>

Slaney also commented on the rapid expansion of building works - workshop, house and court buildings - that developed as the economy and town expanded.<sup>8</sup> Building, as we shall see, was a trade that Irish immigrants were well represented within.

The preponderance of small capitalists and tradesmen is another feature of Birmingham in this period that distinguishes it economically – with demographic and social resonances – from other great towns and cites of this era. Asa Briggs points to the three special features of Birmingham that influenced its development as a town then city and economic force; the long tradition of nonconformity, the wide range of skills and predominance of industry in its economy and labour force, and the close social relations between the economic masters and their employees.<sup>9</sup>

Nineteenth century Birmingham as an industrial centre was untypical in its diverse economic base centered on trade and relatively small scale manufacturing. Trade began to boom in Birmingham in the early 1700s when many improvements in transport infrastructure began. The proximity of coal and iron in the Black Country, as it would



become known, helped this economic expansion. Local merchants at this time began to specialise in manufactured consumer goods and the base for economic lift off was laid with the skills of marketing, metallurgy, provision of credit and production of raw materials for manufacture by smiths and artisans being developed. Therefore, by the early nineteenth century Birmingham was not only a manufacturing centre but also a provider of services, commercial facilities and specialist trades for a wider economic area than just the town.<sup>10</sup> For instance, the manufacture of blades became a lucrative specialism with knives, daggers, swords and razors being produced in workshops such as Sarehole and Pebble Mills. Other products such as nails, household and kitchenware, as well as brassware were developed along with wrought ironmongery; expanding markets for the Birmingham manufacturers. Thus, during the eighteenth century the trades of Birmingham nurtured and cultivated the skills that would become so valuable during the rapid expansion of the nineteenth century.

As the Birmingham economy developed, new trades came to the fore such as button and buckle manufacture and armaments. A monopoly on buttons for English manufacturers was secured via Act of Parliament and Birmingham benefited greatly, becoming the centre of the trade in Britain. For instance, outstanding Birmingham engineer Matthew Boulton inherited a button and buckle company and prosperous manufacturers John Taylor and Sampson Lloyd had interests in the trade, the basis of the wealth and capital that would provide technological innovation to foster the Birmingham and British economy. Together, Taylor and Lloyd combined to form Birmingham's first joint-stock bank that still exists today as Lloyd's Bank. Taylor and Lloyd along with Boulton persuaded James Watt to join them in partnership to develop

the steam engine for commercial use and in 1762 Boulton and Watt opened the showpiece Soho works which became the finest example of advanced engineering in Europe, pioneering the large scale production techniques of the modern factory system. Another of Bolton's experts was William Murdoch, the inventor of gas lighting. Boulton and Watt also invented the world's first steam powered coin press which exported copper coins to the colonies in Africa and America and in 1797 the first English copper penny was produced.<sup>11</sup> Under Boulton's guidance the Soho works employed some of the most gifted in the land producing innovations in steam, artillery, mechanics, optics and horology amongst others - the craftsmen that worked at Soho became sought after as the fame of the factory spread.<sup>12</sup> The influence of the steam engine after the 1830s was of course instrumental in lowering unit costs of production as the industrial age progressed, but steam was not as pernicious on employment rates in Birmingham as other towns and cities due to the high skill craft element of its workforce concentrated in small workshops. It was not until after 1850 that the rise of technological innovation and mechanisation really affected Birmingham trades.<sup>13</sup>

The Birmingham Lunar Society became an important centre for scientific and intellectual discourse in Britain. Closely associated with the society was theologian and pioneer of modern chemistry, Dr. Joseph Priestly, who was also chief physician to Birmingham General Hospital and pioneered the pharmacological benefits of the digitalis Foxglove. Dr. William Withering, James Watt, Matthew Boulton and many other industrial pioneers were also members.<sup>14</sup>

Other examples of the importance of Victorian Birmingham's manufacturers include the Birmingham Mint which was set up by the Heaton family in 1851 using the very same machines and is still exporting to the world today. Avery's scales are another Birmingham specialised craft set up in the eighteenth century as was the manufacture of steel nibs for pens in the nineteenth century and the founding of Dunlop Ltd. by two Irish families in the nineteenth century. Birmingham inventors include the likes of John Wyatt who devised a spinning machine that led to Richard Arkwright's invention of the Waterframe and the foundation of the cotton spinning industry that turned Manchester into the centre of world production and fostered the development of Liverpool as a world port.

As Manchester was the king of cotton manufacture, Birmingham became the emperor of the gun trade. The export of guns in the colonial market earned great wealth for the manufacturers, being exchanged for slaves in the eighteenth century and palm oil in the nineteenth century. Africa was an important market for the Birmingham gun maker with 100,000 to 150,000 exported per annum at the height of the trade.<sup>15</sup> The enterprise had become highly specialised by the mid eighteenth century utilising a multitudinous number of skilled manufacturing and assembly processes as well as employing lower skilled labourers for the more dangerous and dirty work. The small workshop was the typical production centre in the gun trade - as it was in Birmingham as a whole - with the many different processes being sub-contracted out to small businesses. Many young boys were employed in transporting materials and unfinished product between the different processes in the production workshops. Centered originally in Digbeth before moving to the district of Saint Mary's in the early



eighteenth century, the industry employed mainly men. A proof house - still extant - was built in 1813 by Act of Parliament.<sup>16</sup> Mass production started at the British Small Arms factory in 1862.<sup>17</sup> The three main markets for armaments were military, sporting, the colonial and slave trades. In 1815 there were 125 firms manufacturing arms, which had risen to 578 by 1868, out of 7,731 employed in the trade in England and Wales in 1851, 2,867 were in Birmingham.<sup>18</sup> The triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Americas enriched the Birmingham economy.

In 1850, the correspondent for the Morning Chronicle summed up Birmingham's ubiquity in certain trades thus:

There is scarcely a house in Europe and America that is not indebted for some portion of its luxury or its comfort to the enterprise and ingenuity of the men of Birmingham. We place our feet in winter on a Birmingham fender, and stir a Birmingham grate with a Birmingham poker. We ring for our servants with a Birmingham bell, and write our letters of business and affection with Birmingham steel pens. Birmingham supplies our tables with spoons and forks, though not with knives, and our bed and window curtains with rods and rings and ornaments...it provides half the globe with buttons for male costume, and with hooks and eyes for costume of ladies. Pins and needles and thimbles principally come from Birmingham; and we never sit upon a chair or table, or lie upon a bed, or tread upon a floor without delivering advantage from the industry of the metal

workers of that town and neighbourhood; for Birmingham supplies England, Scotland, Ireland and many parts of Europe and American continents with nails, tacks and screws.<sup>19</sup>

The journalist goes on at great length. In a later letter the Special Correspondent quotes an unnamed manufacturer of armaments who noted regarding the colonial Gun Trade that;

They are bartered generally for gold dust, elephants' tusks, palm oil, spices etc. I should say the wars among the blacks keep a couple of thousand men at work in Birmingham.<sup>20</sup>

The correspondent points out how before the abolition of slavery the Birmingham arms trade made large profits out of exporting "Slave Guns". Un-proofed and produced at a very cheap rate they were likely to explode on use and were exchanged in Africa for slaves "a gun for a man".<sup>21</sup> Also, large exports of cutlery and household ironmongery went to the colonial market enriching the Birmingham iron-masters. Birmingham was bestowed at the start of the century by Edmund Burke with the title of "Toyshop of Europe"<sup>22</sup> producing many useful household items and developing into the cheap jewellery trade with a huge variety of products.

The inventiveness and industry of the town first developed from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth drew upon its skilled labour force and ready access to capital through the banks and prosperous merchants and manufacturers.

Communications improved and so did the local economy drawing in labour from its environs and beyond. All this was underpinned by a specific political and social structure.

It was during the 1830s that Birmingham cemented its place as at the forefront of national importance economically and politically. In 1832 Birmingham became a parliamentary borough with two Members of Parliament and by 1838 expanded its territory greatly with its incorporation as a municipal borough. The municipal boundary became 21 miles long with 100 miles of streets, 42 miles of suburban roads and covering 8,420 acres.<sup>23</sup> The foundations of Birmingham Liberal political culture, which characterised the Victorian period, were largely due to the efforts of Thomas Attwood and the members of his Birmingham Political Union. Birmingham has a tradition of dissent that goes back at least as far as the Civil War,<sup>24</sup> Birmingham being in favour of the Parliament - like most of the Midlands - and Attwood's form of Liberal radicalism fitted well within this tradition of non-conformist dissension. Attwood was a banker and - spurred on by the recessions of the 1820s - originally an economic reformer with proto-Keynesian ideas of fiscal method. He turned his talents towards parliamentary reform as part of his mission to change economic policy, setting up the Birmingham Political Union in 1829 as a rallying point for social and economic reformers nation-wide.

Attwood's Union had two principles, moral action - as opposed to violent - and the bringing together of the classes in a true union of the people. This he achieved in many respects in Birmingham, which, perhaps due to its specific diverse small scale



economic structure, had a more open social hierarchy bringing almost the whole town behind his movement. In May 1832 he called a vast meeting on Newhall Hill in Birmingham attended by approximately 200,000 Union members from far and wide to petition for parliamentary reform. Six months later the first Reform Bill was given Royal assent and Attwood was returned unopposed as an MP for Birmingham along with his deputy president Joshua Scholefield. After three years in parliament, Atwood, being disillusioned with the partially reformed parliament, realised that the need for radical reform was his only hope of accomplishing his dreams of economic reform. The revitalisation of the Political Union in 1837 under Attwood, and particularly the Holloway Head meeting in 1838, set the pace for the nation-wide Chartist movement - five of the six points that became the People's Charter were part of the Union's radical program. However, the "moral force" argument lost out to more strident arguments for the use of revolutionary violent compulsion as the only relevant strategy for reform, promulgated by leading Chartists such as Fergus O'Connor.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in these times of struggle between the new capitalists and the emerging urban masses, the middle class activists deserted the movement and violence - in Birmingham and beyond - took over from moral force in the struggle for reform. However, the tradition of class co-operation that allegedly distinguished Victorian Birmingham from so many of its peers, eventually reasserted itself. Thomas Atwood and the Political Union therefore played a fundamental part in defining the political culture of Birmingham and securing its representation in parliament. They also played a great part in the reformation of the municipality. In 1837, the successful lobbying of parliament for incorporation by the revived Birmingham Political Union resulted in an

element of democratic accountability being introduced into local government eventually leading to centralisation of power under an elected body. The radicals gained influence and ascendancy in practically all aspects of the town's governance, securing Birmingham's place as a national centre of Liberal rule. John Bright, Liberal MP for Birmingham, was influential in the passing of the Second Reform Bill in 1867 with its extension of the franchise and his expansion of Attwood's mission to unite the classes of the whole nation. George Dawson<sup>25</sup> and Joseph Chamberlain completed this tradition with the celebrated "civic gospel", a radical approach to local government that was to influence the governance of cities in Britain and beyond. Birmingham was the great centre of British radicalism in the nineteenth century and the legacy of Attwood in the 1830s, Bright in the 1860s and Chamberlain in the 1870s can be seen in local governance practice up until today as well as defining the Birmingham polity as radical Liberal.<sup>26</sup>

Within this tradition of liberal tolerance the Irish played a role in the politics of the town and the nation – especially in relation to Ireland. Radical Chartist Irish Catholic clergymen such as the Rev. Arthur O'Neill agitated from the 1840s through to the 1890s, Fenian activity took place throughout the 1860s and 70s, Irish-American bombers were operative in the 1880s – including Tom Clarke of the 1916 Easter Rising fame - and active Home Rule Associations and Gaelic League clubs promoted Irish nationalism in Birmingham and beyond at the end and turn of the century. Within the town reactionary elements were operating under cover of the liberal consensus, Birmingham having at least three Lodges of the Orange Order<sup>27</sup> in 1835 who were involved in anti-Catholic, and axiomatically after the 1830s, anti-Irish, agitation that

peaked with the Murphy Riots in 1867 when the “Irish area” of Park Street was attacked and suffered considerable damage in a week of disturbances.

For two centuries Birmingham had been a focal point of dissent and it became a national centre for radicalism in the nineteenth century. The economic, political and social life were greatly influenced by the actions and agitations of the many prominent religious dissenters who - it has been argued - made the town a bastion of “religious liberty and a fortress against clerical assumption and bigotry throughout the country”.<sup>28</sup>

While this assertion may be true in regard to Protestant dissenters, for other religions such as Judaism and Catholicism, bigotry and prejudice was still an everyday occurrence. In the previous century there had been sectarian riots between High Church Tory factions and Whig dissenters with the Meeting House in Digbeth being sacked in 1709.<sup>29</sup> Riots again broke out in July 1791 between these groups with the Unitarians getting the worst of it. The consequence of these religious disturbances was the setting up of a Watch Committee and the building of the first barracks to house soldiers in Ashted,<sup>30</sup> so it can be said that the Birmingham police and security services were founded in reaction to religious tension. In 1813 sectarian anxiety in Birmingham was directed against the dissenting chapels in Bond Street, Belmont Row and Ladywell Walk. This time the riotous crowd also sacked the Synagogue in Severn Street.<sup>31</sup>

This said, as the century turned, many Unitarians and Quakers gained and held pivotal posts within the business and administration of public life. Local action that was to define the “civic gospel” of Birmingham was articulated and motivated from the pulpit and meeting houses. For instance, the National Education League founded in 1869



established Joseph Chamberlain in national politics and was largely a product of non-conformist labours and finance.<sup>32</sup> These prominent middle-class men of ideas provided leadership and dynamism to the town that was unusual and particular with political and social ramifications in the suppression of class difference. Importantly, the absence of a local aristocracy was seen as an influence towards a “marked distaste for aristocratic attitudes and pretensions”.<sup>33</sup> Also, as a counterbalancing example of religious tolerance, Birmingham was the first to establish a Catholic Cathedral since the reformation. The foundations of Saint Chad’s were laid on 29 October 1839, consecrated on 22 June 1841, and the cathedral was designed by the great Gothic revivalist Augustus Welby Pugin.

According to Asa Briggs, there were four conditions of work that influenced Birmingham social conditions and history. Firstly, economic development in Birmingham led to an increase in the number of producers rather than larger enterprises. So small workshops were the norm rather than factories, ameliorating the effects of alienation and bringing the everyday relations between employer and employee closer together engendering, he argues, a relative intimacy and friendship. Secondly, Briggs maintains that the large proportion of skilled workers in the labour force affected social relations, for instance only 11% of the workforce was classified as unskilled in 1841. Because of this wages were comparatively high and hours relatively short and the advent of mechanisation did not make skills redundant but created sub-skills that replaced effort rather than expertise. Also, this emphasis on skill meant education had a high status - the Birmingham artisans were renowned for their interest in cultural and scholarly pursuits with working class children having a better chance of

a decent education. Thirdly, social mobility was higher, or at least the atmosphere was more conducive to it. Briggs argues that education created links between the classes as did the relative ease with which the economic cycle could change one's status from master to journeyman and vice-versa within the small workshop system. Also the amount of capital needed to set up in many of the Birmingham trades was small. Finally the role for women and children in the Birmingham workforce was favorable. All these contributed to social, cultural and political alliances between the classes in Victorian Birmingham. The workforce was according to Briggs less militant than elsewhere (although major Chartist riots took place in the Bull Ring in 1839) within this high skill/wage environment forming many trade clubs. The popularity of the friendly societies - interested in promoting social mobility and security - was marked. There were 400 in 1835 and many shared their religious origins with the trade clubs. Some of the later societies inculcated values of self help and mutuality as well as the virtues of character and moral discipline. The importance of adult education was supported through Sunday Schools, libraries and discussion groups; the Birmingham Brotherly Society held adult education classes as early as 1818. Briggs argues that within this atmosphere a more egalitarian system of social mobility was possible.<sup>34</sup> Briggs does not point out, however, that these models of education, trade and recruitment could have deleterious effects on employment patterns in regard to ethnic recruitment from different religions. Evidence exists of recruitment for manufactories being biased towards those who attended Sunday School regularly.<sup>35</sup> The diverse trade and skill base with a high transference of skills between trades did help ameliorate the effect of trade redundancy. Into this specific social and economic configuration the typical Irish migrant would arrive with few manufacturing skills but over time would

adapt and progress. The earliest records of the Irish in the Birmingham area though are linked to mercenary activity.

The first authenticated report for the presence of Irish people in Birmingham is in 1643, during the English Civil War. The Royalist Baronet, Sir Thomas Holte garrisoned his home at Aston Hall for the King. Colonel Levison, Royalist Governor of Dudley Castle, sent 49 musketeers from his garrison to assist him. In December 1643, Parliamentary troops laid siege to the hall and the stone-built parish church, wherein Holte had placed Levison's musketeers. An account of the siege appears in the Parliamentary newspaper, A Perfect Diurnal.

“On Munday last (usually called Christmas day), wee sent out from Coventry under command of Colonel Boswell 800 Horse and Foote, upon a designe against Sir Thomas Holts House near Brumidgham, 12 mils from hence, and our men coming within sight of the House, the Knight forces sounded a Challenge, and we sent to demand the House for the use of King and Parliament” The following day the Parliamentarians assaulted and took the church. It had been “defended by 40 stout French and Irish men,” whom they took prisoner. “They were well armed with Musquetts and Carbines, but not above two swords in all...”<sup>36</sup>

Some 10 years later Irishmen returned to Aston, but in a less warlike manner receiving charity from the local parishes. The Aston Churchwardens' Accounts record:



“1653: Item, given awaie to Irish passengers 0 0 4*d*”<sup>37</sup>

Records also show the movements of Irish perhaps fleeing from religious intolerance in Ireland:

“1689 Given to nine poore Protestants that came with a pass out of Ireland 0 1 0*d*.”<sup>38</sup>

Aston is not unique in recording its Irish visitors, Northfield's Churchwardens' Accounts record Irish people travelling through its parish, from London to Bristol and onto Dublin, during this same period.

In 1643 4*d* was given as an “Item, to an Irish woman with a pas”, in 1648 2*s* 4*d* was “Given to an Irish petisioner”, in 1649 8*d* was “Given to a Irish man & woman that caim by Pase”, in 1656 2*s* 6*d* “It' gave to A leaven Irish with a pas”, in 1662 1*s* was “gave to wimen with a pase out of Ireland” and another 1*s* was “gave to 6 pepell with a pas from Ireland”, in 1665 10*d* was presented to “an Irch whoman with a pas”, in 1684 4*d* was dispensed to “Peeter Conly with a Letter of request”, in 1699 6*d* was presented “to three Souldiers from Ireland goeing for Bristoll wth a letter of request”.<sup>39</sup>

There are also several records in the King's Norton Accounts, where money has been given to Irish travellers. In some entries the recipients are referred to as “poor Irishers”.<sup>40</sup> Providing relief for Irish vagrants was cheaper than the cost of transporting

them back to Ireland so it became customary for parishes to do this whether the Irish had a settlement or not within the parish.<sup>41</sup>

Other pre-nineteenth century links between Ireland and Birmingham would have been forged by military association. The Royal Warwickshire Fusiliers, were formed in 1673, from English and Irish troops. The Regiment, as it then was, came to England in 1688, with William of Orange and though predominantly consisting of Roman Catholic soldiers, fought under William at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and in Flanders from 1690 to 1696. Here the links between the town and the regiment brought Irish men to Birmingham at this period in the late seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup> A letter to a Colonel McDonnell of Great Suffolk Street from a regimental officer of the Royal Birmingham Volunteers in Birmingham in 1795 stated:

“Dear Colonel,

I am sorry to inform you there is at the moment a most dreadful riot here with an Irish regiment, I believe the 116th or Fingall Regiment, all the Dragoons are now drawn up opposite the Swan Inn but the Irish lads do bid them defiance. They have drawn their bayonets on their officers and have behaved very roughly, in short they seem determined not to march until some demands they make are complied with yet the consequences be what they may. Its improbable for you to have the smallest idea what a wretched set of fellows they are.”<sup>43</sup>

Whether any of these ex-soldiers eventually settled in Birmingham is uncertain, but an early military link between Birmingham and Ireland is confirmed. By 1763 a

community with identifiably Irish names had begun to reside in Birmingham. The Franciscan Registers of Edgbaston Masshouse record the November baptism of William Rothwell, whose Godfather was Barnabus Maginness Kendall. Less than two weeks later Patrick, son of Henry and Joanne M'Cabe, was baptised at the Masshouse in Pritchatts Road. Other Irish names appearing in the Baptismal register during the eighteenth century include:-

Margaret Cooney

Susanna Callanan

Patrick Kelly

Edward MacDonel

Agnes Murphy

John Foyle

Rebecca O'Bryan

Mary Doran

Daniel Doyle

John O'Neal

Michael Broghan

Susanna MacNally

Dionysuis Farrell

Thomas MacLaughlin

Maria Kennedy

Sara Daly

Brigit Bourke

Mary Coffee



Patrick Malone

Catherine Conolly

John Walsh

Michael McMarn

Patrick Tracy

Mary Connel

James Rooney

Ann Nowlen

Mary Mahon

Mary Ryley

Mary Noon

PeterMoody<sup>44</sup>

Following the move from Edgbaston, in May 1783, to the newly consecrated church of Saint Peter's, just off Broad Street, the parish priest, Fr. Pacificus Nutt, began entering the country of origin of the Irish parents of the children that he baptised, the entry “Hibernii” appears in increasing regularity after this date.<sup>45</sup>

Also at this time indications of a possibly nascent Irish business community was present as shown by James Sketchley’s directory of 1767, which catalogues six businesses run by Irish named individuals:

Magenis, John, die sinker, Temple Street.

Mackrory, Thomas, joiner, Edgbaston Street.

Moody, Thomas, plane maker, Queen Street.

Moody, John, toymaker and filigree worker, High Street.

Mayo, Edward, toymaker steel and filigree worker, Paradise Row.

Ryley, John, toymaker, Dudley Street.<sup>46</sup>

They are skilled trades for the most part and would counteract the stereotype of the Irish as poor unskilled labourers if place of birth could be confirmed as High Street, and Temple Row were prestigious addresses.

In 1770 the Higgins's were well represented in the Birmingham directory. There was one Thomas Higgins of 13 Thomas Street, Robert Higgins of 1 Russel Street and John Higgins, publican of Old Meeting-House Yard and another John Higgins who was a Plasterer of 22 Paradise Row. Also in Birmingham was a John Magenis, die sinker and engraver of 43 new Hall Street, a John Colley of 90 Dale End who was a Shoemaker and a Joseph Cormack, spur maker of 56 Thomas Street.<sup>47</sup>

In Swinney's Directory of 1777, some trades pursued by Irish named Birmingham residents are recorded. John Ryley of 22 Dudley Street was a bit maker, and Joseph Ryley of Moat Lane a horn button maker, Richard Colley of 63 Pinfold Street was a Gardener and Elizabeth Colley of 67 Park Street was a Taylor. There is also an entry for James Ryley of Dale End, a schoolmaster.<sup>48</sup> The majority of Birmingham's Irish population though, were for the most part unskilled workers, but not universally so by this evidence. Inevitably, however, the evidence and sources draws us towards the poor Irish for reasons of visibility.

By 1800, Birmingham had a firmly established Irish community. It was a scattered one though. The Rate Books for this period, which list house occupiers and landlords, do not show an Irish concentration in any part of the town.<sup>49</sup> The concentration of Irish into “areas” was to be a later innovation, linked to class, religion, ethnicity, health and politics.

Up until the 1860s Britain as a destination for migrating Irish was the least popular choice (the New World offering greater perceived opportunities for those with the resources to escape Ireland and attempt the journey) and the migrant that came to Britain was usually the most impoverished, and overwhelmingly from a rural background and predominantly a young single male. However, in Birmingham this seems to be somewhat different. In 1841 there were 4,683 Irish born in the borough of Birmingham - 2,267 males and 2,056 females. The censuses for 1861 and 1871 also show an almost equal distribution of male and female Irish born in the town. This could demonstrate a settled community with both sexes finding work and being drawn in accordingly equal numbers, or perhaps evidence of non-assimilatory marriage patterns with wives and sweethearts being imported by pioneering male migrants. In 1861 there were 575 Irish born males in Birmingham under 20 years of age with 5,140 over 20 years old. In the same year 556 Irish born females were under 20 years and 5,298 were over. By 1871 365 males and 367 females were under 20, 4,068 males and 4,267 females over 20 years of age in Birmingham.<sup>50</sup>

Those that took the long tramp from their small-holdings and farms to the Irish ports took three main routes out of Ireland. The northern approach drew migrants from



Ulster and North Connaught to Scotland. The southern approach from South Leinster and Munster via South Wales or Bristol, led the emigrant to London or, as the Thirteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners noted in 1847; “Large numbers of Irish have also landed at Newport and Chepstow, and have thence moved on to Cheltenham and other towns in the Midland counties”.<sup>51</sup> The improvements in transport infrastructure, roads, canals and railways, helped drive the urban expansion of the period and almost certainly brought Irish labour into many parts of the country for harvesting work via the three main routes from Ireland - Munster to Bristol; Connaught to Liverpool and Ulster to Scotland - spreading out by foot from the ports to where the demand for seasonal labour existed.<sup>52</sup> This migration engendered knowledge of destinations for potential emigrants as well as channeling them along certain routes.

The main Midland route was from Connaught and Leinster via Dublin to the north of England, many passing through Liverpool, Chester and on to the Midlands.<sup>53</sup> The Irish entering England by Liverpool and Holyhead North Wales came mainly from the impoverished western province of Connaught during the early period of the nineteenth century. During this time the subdivision of land holdings in Ireland had become so excessive that those who had barely a toehold on the land were pushed into seeking supplementary income elsewhere. Seasonal work created by the demands of the British mainland agricultural economy became attractive to under-employed Irish - especially when the barriers placed upon international trade during the Napoleonic period expanded British agriculture. Many Irish chose this solution to Irish economic moribundity in the early part of the century, but it was also part of a longer tradition of agricultural sojourning. Later on the attractions of industrializing Britain and

economic growth throughout the century created a strong pull factor for the Irish migrant into primary, manufacturing, infrastructure and service industries.

Birmingham was well serviced by roads and from the late eighteenth century onwards along with the other centers of industrial economic growth, the town developed a regional system with a direct link to Liverpool and networks into Wales, industrial towns having a larger proportion of long distance links than traditional market towns.<sup>54</sup> Indeed many of the most important roads from London to and the north and to western England had passed through or near to Birmingham for many years, including the road from London to Ireland by way of Chester and Liverpool. Evidence of Irish traveling this route is recorded in the Aston Church Warden accounts for 1663.

“1663 23 July: given to a passenger who had orders for releefe from the churchwardens in his passage to Ireland, 0 0 6*d*

“1664 Given to several Irish people that came with letters pattence”<sup>55</sup>

These letters were orders to towns and parishes to furnish food and shelter to officials on government business. No doubt many less officious Irish travelers passed through and perhaps tarried awhile in the Birmingham area via the route to the south and elsewhere from Ireland. However, as yet no record has been found of their presence. But what we do know is that Birmingham had direct road links to Ireland from at least the seventeenth century.

Birmingham received its first canal link in 1772 and had a direct connection to the Lancashire ports via Thomas Cubitt's Birmingham and Liverpool Junction Canal and a further route went on to London to the great benefit of trade in both cities. The Midlands were the centre of the "Canal Fever" that gripped investors in the late eighteenth century and the new transport revolution was profitable; dividends on the Birmingham canals exceeded 17% by 1790 peaking at 98% between 1824-35. The fastest boats could reach Lancashire in just two days.<sup>56</sup> The success of the Liverpool, Birmingham and London canal link stimulated interest in providing a rail link between the three centers after 1824 when rail transport came out of the experimental stage, the Liverpool link being completed in 1837 as the Grand Junction Railway, the line to London being finished in 1838.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, from the 17th century onwards Birmingham developed strong road, canal and rail links with Ireland and this arguably presented more affluent Irish labour a relatively easy route to the Midlands and Birmingham. Evidence of Irish traveling to Birmingham by canal is furnished by a government report from 1855 which refers to Irish men who claimed poor relief fraudulently, "Three men were known to leave their boat on the canal to come for relief."<sup>58</sup> Those of more modest means would have found well established routes to tramp to the Midlands and beyond. Some decided to stop in Birmingham and what they found there when they arrived was a new and rapidly expanding urban centre at the heart of a regional industrial area.

For those who had made the journey and settled, they originally came from all over Ireland. The Franciscan registers record that at the start of the nineteenth century the



Irish parents of new christenings came from a wide geographical spread within Ireland.<sup>59</sup> By the middle of the century it was emigrants from the West part of Ireland that were mainly attracted to Birmingham and its environs particularly the province of Connaught which includes the counties of Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, and Sligo and is characterised by its poor soil and somewhat isolated position geographically. Giving evidence to the Royal Commission on the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland in 1834, the Rev. T. Macdonald, a Roman Catholic priest of Saint Peter's Birmingham stated that: "The Irish of Birmingham chiefly come from Mayo and Roscommon; those settled emigrate on account of their poverty."<sup>60</sup> The Rev. Edward Peach, Roman Catholic Priest of Saint Chad's Birmingham since 1807, commented to the same inquiry that the immigrant Irish; "Come from Galway, Roscommon, Tipperary, Dublin, Drogheda and other parts of Ireland." He also mentions some emigration from the north of Ireland. In 1856 The Nation referred to the typical Irishman in the Midlands district as being a "poor Connaught peasant".<sup>61</sup> John Denvir writing in the late nineteenth century and hinting at the process of step migration remarked that:

"The Irish have been steadily coming to Birmingham for over a hundred years...at the time of the famine many from the West of Ireland came to the "Black Country" many only speaking Irish. There are few of these old people left now, but many of their children are there still, though they are getting away to America as fast as they can."<sup>62</sup>

Denvir also notes in regard to the Irish working in the Iron industry of the neighbouring districts of Birmingham - West Bromwich and Oldbury - that “a dozen brave Connaught men” were employed there, and as with The Nation correspondent, the only mention of an Irish region of origin in his piece on the Midlands.<sup>63</sup> We can conjecture whether this is just an omission of other regions represented in the area or, given the evidence, suggest that this supports the general migration pattern for Birmingham and its environs from the West of Ireland. Certainly there is no evidence that has come to light of the usual regionally articulated intra-communal violence that is associated with Irish migrants in other cities at this time. Zeisler notes that most of those who placed a county of birth in the samples that she took of the censuses of 1851 and 1881 came from Connaught, mainly Roscommon and Galway. She also noted a tendency among the Irish to reside with those from their own counties.<sup>64</sup> Chinn confirms this regional clustering in Birmingham with his census study from 1851.<sup>65</sup>

In regard to why Birmingham was chosen as a destination by those of the West of Ireland, previous patterns of work in the surrounding countryside is a probable strong factor. In regard to harvesters a report on agricultural statistics in 1900 noted that:

“The men from the West of Ireland go to the Northern and Midland Counties of England,... Very few of the men who go to England go further south than... Warwickshire, Lincolnshire, and North Cambridgeshire. Some also go to... Northamptonshire, Middlesex, and Hertfordshire.”<sup>66</sup>

Zeisler also points out how emigration to Birmingham from the West of Ireland marks out Birmingham as distinct from other urban centres at the time with the notable exception of York.<sup>67</sup>

The rural origin of the Irish in Birmingham also points to their role in seasonal agricultural work as a factor in their coming to the Birmingham area. In 1861 there were 14,297 Irish born recorded in Warwickshire alone and in the West Midland Counties there were 47,571 Irish born.<sup>68</sup> In 1871 in Warwickshire there were 11,569 Irish born, presumably a fraction of the real numbers when second generation and sojourning rather than resident Irish are taken into account.<sup>69</sup> Duggan, referring to sources of labour in Birmingham during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, points out that 70% were inhabitants of Warwickshire and 9% came from the environs of Birmingham:

“The next largest group came not from a contiguous county, but from Ireland, which supplied two and one half percent of the population of the county and presumably a much higher percentage of that in Birmingham.”<sup>70</sup>

Certainly farmers in the Birmingham area employed Irishmen during the early part of the century and their presence was noted in the town as well.<sup>71</sup>

The preponderance of Irish from the West of Ireland is possibly linked to the easiest route from there to the north of England and the Midlands. However, another factor in



choice of destination is the effects of pioneer migrants that know the county and town from agricultural sojourning, settling and attracting kith and kin to their foothold in a new territory. Also the regionalist ties of Irish migrants could reinforce the clustering patterns and help explain the predominance of one Irish region. Not only would contact with home provide information for potential migrants on which to make decisions on areas of settlement - job prospects, housing, community - there is some evidence of remittances being sent home to Ireland by the Irish in Birmingham as well as the attraction of pioneers to their fellows as a process of chain migration. In 1834, Mr. William Phillips, Registered Clerk to the Birmingham Mendacity Society, remarked in respect of Irish labourers - in a somewhat judgmental tone that indicates a possible anti-Irish/migrant agenda - that: "It often happens that, if a young man gets a good place, all his family will flock to him from Ireland and fasten upon him and he is forced to leave the place in order to get rid of them".<sup>72</sup>

Mr. William James Holmes , a plasterer of Birmingham noted in regard to working practices amongst Irish working in the building trade (and also admits English prejudice towards the Irish in Birmingham as well as Irish attitudes to their own sense of regionalism) that:

"They are very charitable one to another when a new one comes; an old hand will sham sickness to put in a relation or friend newly arrived till he gets into the way of the place, and in the meantime will go elsewhere to get work for himself. I don't think this feeling arises from the ill-treatment of the English. They recommend men of their

own tribe; they prefer working with men from the same part of the country as themselves. One man working for me went to work at Kank Heath in Staffordshire, stayed two months and saved 10s a week out of 15s 2d; when he had saved £6 he sent it to his father in Ireland. I know several other instances of their sending money to their relatives in Ireland, from £3 to £6.”<sup>73</sup>

Evidence of remittances for the upkeep of poor relations - and it may be conjectured some was used for the conveyance of fellow migrants - comes from the same year. Here also is an indication perhaps of why the sex ratios of the Irish in Birmingham seem untypical. The Rev. T. Macdonald remarked that, “They give money to one another when in distress and sickness, and they send money to their parents and wives and poor relations in Ireland, especially to their sisters...”<sup>74</sup>

The Rev. Edwin Peach noted that:

“Many have placed money in my hands to keep for them, so that I have had near one hundred sovereigns at a time; the highest sum paid by each not more than £16 or £18, and some not more than a sovereign; when received it back they probably took it to Ireland. They are good to their relations and I have often found them to send money to their old parents in Ireland.”<sup>75</sup>

William Whittle and James Holmes respectively a Builder and Plasterer of Birmingham made similar observations.<sup>76</sup> This practice was also referred to by the Special Correspondent of The Nation in 1856.<sup>77</sup>

Having walked from their native lands to the nearest port of embarkation, mainly Dublin or Drogheda, those pushed by poverty or lack of opportunity, pulled or inspired to migrate to the promised high wages of England - perhaps choosing the Midland counties due to the knowledge of previous sojourns or news and remittances from pioneer migrants - the Irish would take one of the regular steamship sailings to Liverpool, Holyhead, Bristol or a number of smaller ports from whence they would spread through the counties of England.<sup>78</sup> However, in the early period of the nineteenth century Irish immigrants were increasing especially after the crop failures and famine of 1820-3, marking the start of that phase of migration that is most remembered today - the Great Famine emigration - that reached its peak in the years 1847-50.

The agricultural decline that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars stimulated the numbers of harvesters and other migrant workers arriving in Britain in the early part of the century, searching for work in a restructuring agricultural economy shifting from plough to pasture. Indeed, Redford notes that during the harvest time of 1815, "Droves of Irish cattle poured into England through Liverpool, Bristol and the Welsh ports, covering the roads for miles-and blazing the trail for the droves of human beings who followed."<sup>79</sup> Redford also comments on the practice of sojourning workers presenting themselves as destitute to a parish that would then pay for their passage back to Ireland or elsewhere in Britain. The law that facilitated this process was passed



in 1819 and was popular with the seasonal workers.<sup>80</sup> The minutes given in evidence before the select committee on Irish and Scottish vagrants in 1828 by a Mr. T. L. Pain noted that a common practice was for Irish sojourners to earn money in Britain in the summer months before sewing it into their clothes and then present themselves to the local parish as destitute for removal to Ireland.<sup>81</sup> Examples of how this effected the Irish in Birmingham are shown in the Report from the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants in 1833. The report shows concern for this practice of subterfuge:

“Your committee have had evidence before them to show that gross frauds are constantly practised by these paupers many of whom having obtained their pass to Ireland, never reach their place of destination, but having escaped from the custody of the person entrusted with their removal, are known to return in short periods, again to throw themselves on the parishes in the metropolis or elsewhere and to re-commence their journey at the public expense”<sup>82</sup>

Certainly many Irish utilised the 1819 Vagrancy Act that facilitated the passing of Irish and Scottish vagrants back to the parishes of their origin.<sup>83</sup> Edward Grove, a magistrate of Stafford and Warwickshire interviewed by the committee, noted that between 1827 and 1829 some 7,145 passed from London through his jurisdiction on the way to Liverpool and all were Irish, some from Birmingham who must have joined on the way. When asked whether there was much relief of Irish vagrants in the county of Warwickshire he replied:

“Yes they would be considerably relieved also, but not altogether to the same extent, because many get into the large town of Birmingham; and since the corporation of the town of Bristol have refused to only pass Irish by land and send them all by sea, Pat does not quite like that mode of travelling so well, and he slips away from Bristol and gets down into a different line, and they then go to Gloucester and Worcester; but the magistrates of those counties have been exceedingly active in their inquiries, and have punished some of them and now they are hanging about the town of Birmingham. If they can not ride a long way, they would rather ride a short way than not ride at all; and the numbers passed through Staffordshire are much increased from the Birmingham district. *Chairman* - So since the passage from Bristol to Liverpool has been stopped the number of Irish paupers that come by way of Birmingham have considerably increased? - They have; and to a degree the whole of that line of road has been increased; but from Bristol itself, I believe there has not been one passed since 1828. *Chairman* - Have you found lately many passes signed by Birmingham magistrates? - Yes.”<sup>84</sup>

Mr. Thomas Brutton, Governor of the Gaol and House of Correction in Stafford confirms the flight of Irish in transport and presents an insight into those Irish who were seemingly genuinely impoverished. When asked about the state of Scottish and Irish vagrants under his jurisdiction while in transit to Ireland, he replied; “Some are brought in a state of nudity; some very filthy; some sick; and often women who have

been brought to bed<sup>85</sup> next day...many have escaped before being brought to Stafford”<sup>86</sup>

Mr. Thomas Alcock, Master of the Birmingham Workhouse speaking in 1836 commented about the Irish vagrant that:

“They resort to large parishes such as Birmingham as the small parish will not relieve them...I recognise some in passing as having been passed before... I once searched an Irish man who having come with his family casually for a night’s lodging, and found four sovereigns on him. He stated when applying for relief, that he had no money; he had earned money by harvesting.”<sup>87</sup>

The practice was still causing concern to the Birmingham Poor Law Officers delivering relief in the mid 1850s:

“There were numerous cases of imposition. I heard one man admit that he was joint owner with his brother of a farm in Ireland, and that he had £50 in the bank....A woman who pleaded great poverty was, on being minutely examined by an experienced female searcher, found to have 8s. 6d. in money concealed on her person....Three men were known to leave their boat on the canal to come for relief. Women in numerous instances represented their husbands as being in Wolverhampton, and even in America, who actually produced their husbands, when they found they could not get relief without, within a



couple of hours. Parties applied three or four times over in different names, and gave wrong addresses. I spoke to a very honest Irishman a day or two since, who said he had not applied for relief during this pressure; he was earning 16s. a week, which supported himself his wife and two children; but he knew of numerous instances in which parties very much better off than himself had applied for relief and obtained it.”<sup>88</sup>

This report also provides some evidence of the Birmingham Irish disembarkation from Liverpool. While being questioned on the numbers of Irish coming to Britain, Clerk to the Guardians of the Poor in Birmingham James Corder remarked as a reason:

“The vessels from Ireland bring them over at so cheap a rate.”

*Chairman* - “To what place?”

“To Liverpool; sometimes as deck passengers at 1s. or even 6d. each; they used to do so at one time.”<sup>89</sup>

The evidence given to the committee suggests that as well as the more well understood routes from ports such as Liverpool that internal migration of the Irish was responsible for settlement in Birmingham as well. The influence of national legislation along with its interpretation by local magistrates and officers in the passing of vagrants pushed some into the Birmingham district, and as the larger parishes were more able and perhaps willing to relieve the Irish, this effected destination choice, showing the complexity of migration patterns external and internal.

Although the Catholic Irish were fairly evenly spread throughout Birmingham in this period, calculating the true size and location of the community is problematic.<sup>90</sup> It is important to recognise the true extent of Irish influence within nineteenth century Britain and for that a better understanding of the extent of the community's size is required. To determine this figure we need to recognise some of the limitations of raw census data and balance these figures with other relevant evidence, although this itself is methodologically problematic.<sup>91</sup>

According to the census of 1841 there were 4,683 Irish born in the borough of Birmingham out of a total population of 182,894, 2.56% of the population. By 1851 their numbers had increased to 9,341<sup>92</sup> Irish born out of a total population of 232,841, 4% of the population. In 1861 the total numbers of Irish born peaked at 11,332 out of a population of 296,076 but the percentage had fallen to 3.8%. By 1871 this number had fallen to 9,076 out of a total population of 343,787 or 2.64%. The 1881 census recorded 7,072 out of a total population of 408,004 or 1.7% of the population.<sup>93</sup> These figures follow the periodisation pattern of pre-Great Famine immigration setting the scene for immigrant settlement followed by a large increase in numbers due to the Great Famine emigration, peaking in the immediate post-Great Famine period and then tailing off towards the end of the century. The sex ratio however, as pointed out earlier, does not support the general trend of Irish migration as being mainly male.

Apart from these official figures a number of commentators have estimated the numbers of Irish in Birmingham from 1800 onwards, the accuracy of which can only be



conjectured. Commenting in 1828 Dr. John Darwall, Physician to the Birmingham Dispensary, asserted (while making note of the transitory nature of the Irish population) that, "...there is a large class of Irish, who are said to be seldom less than 5,000 in number, but who are perpetually changing."<sup>94</sup> Speaking in January 1834 the Rev. Edward Peach noted that around the turn of the century there was no more than 100 in the town but their number began to increase after 1820 (coinciding with a famine period in Ireland) and especially after 1826 so that "My chapel would not hold my congregation by many hundreds... there has been no such influx since." He estimated that "the Irish Roman Catholics under my charge amount to at least 5,000 to 6,000."<sup>95</sup> This was also possibly due to the increase in vagrancy after the Napoleonic Wars. In the same report Mr. William Phillips Registered Clerk to the Birmingham Mendacity Society opined that the numbers of Irish were around 10,000 to 11,000, perhaps including those who were not regular churchgoers, transients and (less likely) Protestants as an explanation of the higher estimate.<sup>96</sup> Also, John Mouchet Baynham Esq. Surgeon of the General Dispensary, and of the town Infirmary of Birmingham noted that he had 2,000 Irish under his care, this being in an area about one sixth of the town.<sup>97</sup> Some twenty years later and nearing the peak of Irish born according to the census, James Corder estimated 20,000 Irish in Birmingham in 1855, nearly double the census figure recorded some four years earlier. This number very probably included those who were of Irish ethnicity but English or other born, not to mention those that the census would not catch such as transients; seasonal fluctuations could alter the numbers perceived as well. Speaking in January, it was possible that the sojourning section of the Irish community was at its lowest seasonal ebb, being in mid-winter, and of course we must not forget the exodus from Ireland following the Great Famine which continued up until the 1870s.<sup>98</sup> The Special Correspondent for The Nation



reporting on the Irish in England in 1856 estimated there were 15,000 Irish in Birmingham.<sup>99</sup> John Denvir commenting in the 1890s suggests the number of Irish Catholics in Birmingham in 1861 to be around 4,000. Although this estimate is much lower than the census figure, Denvir quotes Irish nationalist Father John Sherlock as his source so this number is possibly those Irish under his ministry at Saint Michael's Moor Street rather than the whole town. Sherlock also commented that:

“The formation of a large Catholic population here dates from the commencement of the Famine in Ireland. As the great majority of them on arriving here were destitute, they fixed their habitations where they could get them cheapest, and at the same time near their employment. The elder of the families work at buildings, while the younger and the females are employed in factories.”<sup>100</sup>

During 1872 the Irish nationalist weekly newspaper, The Nation began a series of articles under the title “The Irish in England”. This survey was the first comprehensive examination of the Irish in England written by Irish Nationalist and 1830s emigrant to Birmingham, Hugh Heinrick. As O'Day points out, Heinrick was less than methodical in his research, his sources unsystematic and his methodology poor. However, the survey is important as it is one of the very few primary sources focusing on the Irish in Britain in the period and its timing is important falling as it does between the Great Famine migration and the latter Irish emigration that came with the agrarian depression at the end of the century.<sup>101</sup>

Heinrick who was active politically in Birmingham and knew and worked with another Birmingham Irishman John Denvir, was keen to emphasise the role played by artisan and middle class Irish in setting a good example to their less fortunate countrymen; no doubt an hegemonic consideration to counteract negative stereotypes of Irishness prevalent in Britain. Operating within the nationalist discourse of the era, he was also a great believer in the superiority of his “race” within education and literature.<sup>102</sup> He was determined to assess the community in its full sense, and all his calculations of numbers included those of Irish descent who were English born. Thus he concluded that the total community in England consisted of 2,500,000, a figure that O’Day regards as “a gross exaggeration”.<sup>103</sup> However, this illustrates the problem of gauging the real extent of the Irish in Britain, and discerning who they were due to problems with census data already discussed in the introduction as well as integrationist and assimilatory processes.

Heinrick began his work with what today would be called a mission statement:

“To follow in the footsteps of our race and kindred, whom the evil effects of an alien rule have made wanderers and sojourners in the land of the oppressor; to point out their fate, fortunes, and destiny in the home of their adoption...this is the task which the commission with which I am charged imposes on me.”<sup>104</sup>



His topographical account was fortunate in briefly visiting Birmingham. He estimated that the population in 1872 was over 30,000 but this figure must be weighed against O'Day's comments on exaggeration linked to Heinrich's political agenda.<sup>105</sup>

These accounts are most useful in providing an indication of migrant numbers in the pre-1841 period that the census does not provide. This said, the accuracy and methodologies of these observations are also problematic and must be treated as rough estimates with caveats inserted in regard to their own historical specificity and any biases or agendas this could bring about. However, contemporary accounts do offer an alternative view on how the community was perceived by informed observers of the time. Invariably the commentators on the Irish community in Birmingham estimate their numbers as greater than the official figures for a number of reasons as outlined in the introduction; large unrecorded seasonal and economic labour flows, poor record keeping by census enumerators, recording of Irish born only, problems of religious identification in defining community and possible reluctance to engage with officialdom. These limitations help explain the contradiction between the census numbers and the amount of people identified as ethnically Irish by contemporary observers. Another consideration is that of the Protestant Irish who may have conceived themselves to be a part of a different community while still remaining Irish. It is obvious that before reliable census data was collected on place of birth (commencing 1841) the true number of Irish born - never mind those of Irish ethnicity - is hard to determine from the estimates given to government commissions varying as they do between 5,000 to 6,000 Roman Catholic Irish to 10,000 to 11,000 of Irish per se. What can be said is that there were 4,863 Irish born in 1841 and this was probably



an underestimation of the true size of the Irish community as a whole but does not seem too out of line with the estimates given in 1828 and 1834, assuming there was no great influx or outflow of permanently resident Irish between those dates. This number increased throughout the early part of the century to reach its peak in 1861 in line with the pre-Great Famine, Great Famine, and post Great Famine diacritic of Irish emigration.

By 1800 Birmingham had, as already mentioned, established itself, after rapid expansion in the late eighteenth century, as an industrial and commercial centre of national importance. During the early decades of the nineteenth century Birmingham grew swiftly, increasing its population by some 100,000 between 1831 and 1851, the borough of Birmingham growing from 233,841 to 400,774 inhabitants between 1851 and 1881.<sup>106</sup> The close proximity of residence and workshop that characterised the small-scale industrial make up of Birmingham determined distinct craft areas such as the Jewellery and Gun Quarters. These areas created working-class districts with families living cheek by jowl with the trades that heads and other members of the family were involved in.<sup>107</sup> At this time of rapid urban development and the inability of many towns' and cities' housing and sanitation infrastructures to cope with the rise in populations and industries, Birmingham was blessed with geographical advantages that mitigated many of the problems faced by other urban sectors at this time as already noted. The Chadwick Report in 1842 recorded that Birmingham "...enjoys almost an immunity from fever in consequence of the fortunate position of the town conferring advantages in respect to drainage, and the good construction of its houses."<sup>108</sup> This said, there were still areas of poverty and environmental degradation that were classified as the classic slum and inevitably these areas

became the focus of middle-class concern and subsequently police and other local and national state surveillance. The discernible and commented upon Irish settlements fell into two basic districts, the areas around London Prentice Street, Thomas and John Streets which were the focus of the noted community in the first half of the century, and the Park and Allison Street areas that took over as the community focus in the second half of the century. There were other noted Irish streets and districts such as the Old Inkleys, Vale Street, Green's Village and Slaney and Moor Streets, but these were less commented upon in the sources. Although these were the focus of the public perception and memory of the Irish districts in Birmingham, the real spread and diffusion of the Irish born community was more complex.

Zeisler conducted a census sample from 1851 and 1881 of Irish households in five of the town's parishes. Saint Martin's and Saint Jude's, in the centre of the town, had relatively high concentrations of Irish; Saint Mary's, slightly further out, was at the centre of the Gun Quarter, where - it is suggested - it was not easy for the unskilled immigrant to penetrate specialised trades, yet it too had a significant Irish contingent. According to the sample the three most populous Irish areas in Birmingham in 1851 were Saint Jude's where 25 percent of the population were Irish born, Saint Mary's with 19 percent and Saint Martin's with 10 percent.<sup>109</sup>

By 1851 the immigrant Irish could be found to some extent in every parish in Birmingham with at least a few in almost every street. This said, Zeisler notes the tendency of ethnic clustering in certain streets and areas, particularly certain courts.<sup>110</sup>

The parish of Saint Jude's had a large concentration of Irish in the aforementioned Old Inkleys and Green's Village for instance. The areas close to these centres of



congregation such as Vale Street, showed a more homogeneous dissemination of Irish, but the more affluent areas of the main concourse such as Suffolk and Worcester Streets the Irish disappear residentially with the exception of those employed as live in servants to English households. Zeisler notes that the Irish in the parish of Saint Martin's concentrated within the courts off Edgbaston Street and the afore mentioned Park Street and Park Lane, where there were many lodging houses. The Parish of Saint Mary's, near to the parishes of Saint Philip's and Saint Peter's, which also had Irish communal areas, displayed a concentration of Irish in Weaman and Slaney Streets. Zeisler found that the Irish were less concentrated in Saint Mary's than in the other areas mentioned. Districts on the outskirts of Birmingham had very few Irish, only territory adjacent to Irish concentrations showed any appreciable figure of residence in Zeisler's sample.<sup>111</sup>

Although the sources argue that the area around Allison Street, on the eastern edge of the town centre, was traditionally designated the "Irish Quarter" this is not born out by the sample with no single area being conveniently delineated as mainly Irish. In fact, there was not a single area which could be thus designated. Allison Street, Park Street and their environs were admittedly heavily Irish, but so too were many other small groupings of streets.<sup>112</sup>

The pattern according to Zeisler's work seems to be a heavy concentration of Irish in certain areas and residences, clustering close to the central business district but occupying the cheaper accommodation - the main thoroughfares being occupied by well to do English who employed the Irish as servants - as we move further out the Irish are still present but in lesser concentrations until we leave the central area when



Irish residence becomes negligible. Chinn's study of the 1851 census also shows that the Irish were diffused throughout Birmingham with concentrations in various areas. 76% of the Irish lived in central Birmingham.<sup>113</sup>

Although the Irish were present in almost every street in Birmingham by the 1850s, they were most visible in the courts and streets that were notorious for their low class inhabitants. This is where they first concentrated but also where their churches and schools were.<sup>114</sup> Although more Irish born lived on Livery Street than London Prentice Street in 1851<sup>115</sup> it was the latter that was considered the Irish area of note in the written sources due to the concentration of Irish - and the physical/social status of the area that marked it out as noteworthy.<sup>116</sup> Although the inhabitants of this area were described as mendicants, the lowest Irish and prostitutes, the pattern of impoverished immigrant populations clustering in poor areas in order to gain a foothold in their new environment did not just hold true for the Irish:

“Some of these houses are occupied exclusively by foreigners. In a court, in Park-Street, we visited one which was inhabited by Italians, men and women, with their stock of musical instruments, monkeys, and other small animals. We are informed that there is another Italian lodging-house in Lichfeild-Street, as well as one which is frequented only by the Flemish or German broom-girls.”<sup>117</sup>

As early as 1828 Dr. Darwall noted the proximity of the Jewish area in Dudley Street to the Irish in Birmingham, showing that reception districts for the immigrant were concentrated in the same low quality area.<sup>118</sup>

By the 1860s the “Irish Quarter” was perceived to be centred around the Inkleys, Slaney Street and Park Street areas and numbers had increased with the Great Famine refugees.<sup>119</sup> However, T. P. Heslop commented on the areas of John Street, Thomas Street and London Prentice Street that were outlined above as still Irish:

“This is a picture equally true to life in 1866 as in 1828. The very streets named by Dr. Darwall as the chosen seat of the Irishry, in 1828, are still their favourite quarter after the lapse of nearly forty years.”<sup>120</sup>

Although these areas were vulnerable to development, one area noted as Irish in the 1842 Report into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population, Moor Street, was still cited as an Irish area at the turn of the century. Among the papers of Roman Catholic Priest, Farther Arthur Leeson Chattaway, there is the following reference to the Catholic Mission of Saint Michael's Moor Street:

“Saint Michael's Mission is one of the oldest in the city, and one might say the poorest. The population is mainly Irish, with a fair sprinkling, however, of Italians, of which there are in its immediate neighbourhood something like 300. That venerable and warm-hearted priest, who was so well known and esteemed throughout the city, Farther Sherlock, was placed in charge of this district in 1853, and worked the Mission from a temporary chapel in Well Lane, Allison Street. Finding, however, the accommodation afforded in that dingy quarter quite inadequate for the large population of the



neighbourhood, he purchased in 1862 from the Unitarians the present chapel...”<sup>121</sup>

A factor which marked out the two distinctly visible Irish areas was their connection with Catholicism. The London Prentice Street area was close to Saint Peter's Catholic Church, the Park Street area close to the Catholic chapel in Well Lane and later Saint Michael's on nearby Moor Street and the Oratory of Saint Phillip Neri on Alcester Street. The provision of spiritual needs were obviously important for Catholic Irish immigrants in selecting their settlement area,<sup>122</sup> and the Catholic Church likewise began to respond to their needs as their numbers grew by consolidating their missions in these areas.

The distinct Irish areas were finally destroyed by redevelopment of the town and a mass destruction of the slums, and the old “Irish” areas disappeared forever, although the Irish as a group and their negative ascription forged in this period did not. Mid-century many of the Victorian towns and cities were transformed and redeveloped with Birmingham being no exception. This major development began in the 1860s and 70s where the old small shops, dwelling places and workshops began to give way to the wide thoroughfares and large fronted retail stores we see today. The railways were influential in the restructuring of Birmingham that cleared the slums along with the building of New Street, Corporation Street and others. This clearance was helped by the land-owning elite such as Colonel Vyse - owner of much of the Inkleys - who had more to gain by redeveloping their land as prices increased.<sup>123</sup> Thus the population of the slum areas and distinct “Irish Quarter” were lost as the central part of the town became the business district rather than a residential one.<sup>124</sup>



The mass influx of Irish into Britain during the mid nineteenth century at a time of urban growth and nascent public health and housing policies, as well as problems of food distribution and health and safety in the workplace caused many problems for the migrant Irish as well as their British working class neighbours. However, the Irish, as Jackson and others have pointed out, were singled out for special reference by the many commissions and investigations conducted by the state and other institutions throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>125</sup> Works like this led to a co-joining of Irish migrants and their descendants to the poor state of the areas they occupied in the minds of the opinion formers of Victorian Britain and by proxy “public opinion”. They were deemed responsible for many of the worst cases of urban deprivation that they occupied as an overwhelmingly poor migrant group. The stigma of what affected a portion of the migrant population became an almost universal trait of “Irishness” in the nineteenth century social discourse.<sup>126</sup> This discursive hegemonic project of linking the Irish with moral as well as social decay - as typified by the aforementioned J. P. Kay - was taken up by commentators such as Thomas Carlyle, Frederick Engels and a host of others. Henry Mayhew and A. B. Reach who wrote the London and Northern articles for the Morning Chronicle's survey into the poor of British cities were also influenced by Kay's work as were many others.<sup>127</sup> The attitudes and prejudices of these influential middle class “primary definers” of the social reform movement filtered down into the national and local discourse where they fused with older and more locally specific prejudices towards the migrants. The commentators in Birmingham were no exception to this discursive ascription of negative traits to the poor Irish reified into the whole of the Irish as an ethnic group.

The lived environment of the poor Irish in Birmingham was similar to their native working class neighbours, but it was the immigrant communities who were singled out as occupying the worst of these conditions in many cases. The negative association between environment, migration and ethnicity grew out of the nineteenth century preoccupation of the local and national state with a number of issues facing the newly burgeoning urban areas. Issues of health, housing, crime, morality and the state and the tax payers' role in social engineering and/or policing of the poor working class districts of the city became topics of major concern to politicians, social reformers and the public. It was at this time that the construction of a common consensus of what the problems of the poor city were, what was to be done and who was to blame, was forged. The slum areas of the city were populated on the whole by the "dangerous classes", becoming "breeding grounds" of vice, corruption and moral degeneration. What is more, they posed a real threat to health and hygiene - physical and moral - exporting disease and subversion into the bosom of the "decent" classes - whether they be middle or working class. Within this discourse of the underprivileged urban space as threat, the Irish, as the most visible group within the poorest areas of city depravation - especially after their numbers increased so dramatically mid century - became an axiomatic part of the problem in the public and private consciousness and memory. Not only were they pointed out as carriers of disease, competitors for scarce resources within the labour and housing markets and black legs in industrial disputes, they were also seen as instigators of urban decay and a very real political threat in their support for Irish nationalism and working class politics. They also posed a perceived risk to the established Church in their crucial role of supporting and nourishing the Catholic revival in Britain. In many ways the Irish in Britain typified the antithesis of the decent middle class Englishman and as such helped define a notion of Englishness/Britishness in their opposition. In the areas of church, state and (in the sense of national health and political



loyalty) nation they became the significant “Other” of British nationalist discourse, a real and imagined/symbolic threat. Therefore, they became the focus of discrimination, prejudice and violence within the nineteenth century British state. The resonances of this discursive hegemonic ascription of the immigrant as dangerous to state and nation still holds a powerful grip on the public consciousness up to the present day. These ideas are reinvented and reinforced by a new generation of “primary definers” before dissemination through the hegemonic conduits of the nation - notably within the reactionary elements that dominate important sectors of the mass media.

The ripples and waves of this ascription can be first found in government reports, private, local, and church papers as well as the press and political comment of the era throughout the Britain isles. In Birmingham, with its relatively small Irish population, it would perhaps be expected that this discursive feature of British national discourse would be rare or at least less pronounced. However, there is plenty of evidence to show that the poor slum dwelling Irish were a problematic even in such relatively small numbers in a town blessed with relatively good housing and public health. As ever, it was those Irish resident in the poor areas that were singled out for special mention.

One of the most notorious slum districts of Birmingham that was inexorably associated with the poor immigrant Irish was the aforementioned district that covered London Prentice Street<sup>128</sup> and the John and Thomas Street areas which were all close to Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church and had as already noted developed into a lodging-house sector inhabited by a strong Irish presence as early as 1828.<sup>129</sup> The concentrations of lodging-houses in these areas were a source of great concern to the patrician authorities throughout Britain who considered them centres of crime and



moral and physical deprivation. Dr. Darwall commented on the conditions in the slum districts, singling out the Irish and Jewish areas for special attention:

“The only part of the town which, from their peculiarity, appear deserving of notice are Dudley Street and its neighbourhood, which is principally occupied by Jews; and the neighbourhood of Thomas Street, John Street, London Prentice, etc. where the Low Irish congregate.”<sup>130</sup>

In regard to housing he points out that:

“...the streets of Birmingham are, for the most part, wide and spacious, and the Courts generally have large Yards. Unlike Liverpool and Manchester, excepting that part of town which is occupied by the Irish, it is rare to find more than one family, in one house, and I know not any situation where Cellars are occupied as dwellings...”<sup>131</sup>

He goes on to mention how the Dudley Street housing stock was improving and public health in relation to fever was rare. In relation to the Irish area however, he points out that, “...here Fever prevails to a greater extent than elsewhere and the Fever Wards of the town Infirmary are mostly supplied from these streets.”<sup>132</sup> At this time, however, the causes for the poor health of the area is ascribed to the overcrowding within the lodging houses that the Irish occupied and “meagre Diet to which the Irish labourers submit”.<sup>133</sup> Both are environmental causes not specifically ascribed to the Irish as an “ethnic character trait” as would emerge as the century proceeded. This said though he does go on to comment that:

“...there is a large class of Irish, who are said to be seldom less than 5,000 in number, but who are perpetually changing. It is with these that Fever most prevails, and their habits, morals and condition, are very far inferior to the native artisans...The part of the town which the Irish most frequent, is not more closely built than many others in which Fever does not prevail; but the population is more dense, and, as has already been suggested, it is to this, with their low Diet, that the greater frequency of this Disease in their quarters is to be attributed. Whether, however, the Fever attacks the native inhabitants or these miserable emigrants, it exhibits no specific difference in its character; yet it is much more fatal with the latter than with the former.”<sup>134</sup>

In 1834, a Mr. John Walthew, a builder of Birmingham called to give evidence to the inquiry into the state of the Irish poor, recorded - in rather less measured terms than Dr. Darwall - that the Irish still were occupied in overcrowded lodging houses within the slum districts of the town:

“The Irish live in certain quarters generally in a low neighbourhood; they inhabit lodging-houses where the English labourers would not live; they lie together like pigs. I once searched all the lodging houses in Birmingham for an Irishman who committed a murder; and in several houses 12 or 14 were sleeping in a small room not 13 foot square; in one house a bed was fixed over the head of the stairs; they sleep four or five or six to a bed.”<sup>135</sup>



Here, a certain measure of ethnic difference can be discerned: the English labourers would not live like this and certainly would not be described in such pejorative, animalistic and criminal terms.

Like Darwall's observations, the Slaney Report of 1840 noted that multiple occupancy of Birmingham domiciles was rare and the streets and drainage of the town were better than most comparable urban centres as was the water supply and provision of privvys and cess pits. Birmingham was for the most part built upon hill sides and had good drainage into the valleys and the soil was high in gravel and therefore porous. However, Slaney did point out the Deritend Bordesley area as an exception. This included the Park and Allison Street districts. In this locale open sewers ran in front of the houses and they stank in the warm months. Here typhoid fever was unsurprisingly at its worst.<sup>136</sup> Many of the poor had large fires in their houses and kept their doors and windows open for ventilation.<sup>137</sup> In a typical comment of the period, Slaney opines that the reason Birmingham's environmental conditions were better than Manchester's was due to so few Irish living in the town.<sup>138</sup> However, when asked to compare the health habits of the Birmingham Irish to those of other towns he replied: "The habits of the poorer classes of the Irish in Birmingham are better than those of the poorer class of Irish I have met with in other places; they are not so reckless and appear better off."<sup>139</sup> Here the link between ethnicity/national character and the social status/worth of the Irish is clear but caveated by their class position. It is the "reckless" lowest orders of the Irish that are the "problem".

By 1842 the working class areas of Birmingham and elsewhere came under national state investigation again. The Committee of Physicians and Surgeons reporting to the



Chadwick Report into Sanitary Conditions of the Towns and Cities commented upon Birmingham that:

“Lodging houses for the lowest class of persons abound in Birmingham. They principally exist near the centre of the town; many of them are situated in courts, but great numbers of front houses, in some of the old streets, are entirely occupied by lodging houses. They are generally in a very filthy condition; and, being the resorts of the most abandoned characters, they are sources of extreme misery and vice. These houses may be divided into three kinds - mendicants’ lodging houses - lodging houses where Irish resort, and lodging houses, in which prostitutes live or which they frequent.”<sup>140</sup>

Here the report makes plain the link between ascribed criminality, degradation, mendacity, prostitution, moral decay and Irish ethnicity coupled to low class position.

It goes on to note that:

“The mendicants’ lodging houses are principally situated in Thomas Street, John Street, Lichfeild Street, Park Street, Slaney Street, Steel-house-lane, Mill-Street, Lees-Lane, Moor Street, Edgbaston Street, Dudley Street and the Inkleys. Mr Burgess, the Chief Commissioner of Police for this town, has obligingly allowed us access to his statistical returns, from which we find that the police are acquainted with 122 houses of this description situated principally in the streets which we have mentioned. In many of these houses the sleeping

rooms are in a loathsome condition, being crowded with beds, and almost devoid of ventilation. We find it stated in Mr. Burgess's return, that in 47 of these the sexes indiscriminately sleep together. In the day time the doors of these houses are generally thronged with dirty, half-dressed women and children; and, if visited in an evening, the inmates are found to be eating, drinking, and smoking: Such houses are, for the most part, occupied by beggars and trampers, but many of them are the resorts of thieves.”<sup>141</sup>

Although the Irish are not explicitly mentioned in this extract they were represented in most of the areas mentioned. The ideas of the Irish as contagion, responsible for disease and degradation are foregrounded in this further extract from the Chadwick report:

“From Mr. Burgess's return we find that 252 Irish lodging-houses are known to the police. Some of the inhabitants of these houses are beggars and trampers, but the majority of them are resident labourers, employed by the builders<sup>142</sup> and in various occupations. These houses are situated principally in the old parts of the town; they abound in Slaney-Street and London Prentice Street. The latter is now almost entirely occupied by the low Irish, and is one of the filthiest streets in the town. During the last summer the small-pox prevailed in this street and Mr. Gem, the parochial surgeon of the district, informs us that it destroyed 24 of his patients in that street, all of whom were Irish children who had not been vaccinated, although vaccination is

performed, without any charge, at two public institutions within a quarter of a mile of that situation. We find that the low Irish that reside in this town have a great repugnance to vaccination, and cannot be prevailed upon to allow their children to undergo it. The premises occupied by these persons are, for the most part, in a very neglected condition; and their furniture, bedding, and clothes of a meagre and squalid description.”<sup>143</sup>

The Chadwick Report goes on further to underline the point with descriptions of the ascribed criminality associated with certain inhabitants of the “Irish” areas:

“Some idea may be formed of the description of persons who frequent some of these abodes, by stating that in two of them, one of which was situated in John-Street and the other in Thomas-Street, a chain, fastened at one end with a staple and at the other secured by a padlock, was placed on the outside of the door at the foot of the staircase which led to the sleeping apartments. Upon asking the mistress of the house for what purpose that was required? She replied that she employed it to lock in the lodgers until she released them in the morning, as they would otherwise decamp and take away whatever furniture or moveables they could carry with them.”<sup>144</sup>

The report's preoccupations with the moral character of the inhabitants are perhaps not surprising as the environment and occupants of these areas represented the very antithesis of English middle class respectability, and always beneath the surface was



the brooding threat of the un-incorporated working class masses at a time of urban, social and economic transformation at home and abroad. These tensions were stimulated by the revolutionary movements in Europe and Ireland between 1830 and 1848, along with internal Chartist agitations prevalent from 1838. The growing salience of nationalism as a unifying ideology for political change in Europe was another factor stimulating revolution and resistance to it from entrenched elites.<sup>145</sup> Large open air meetings in Birmingham had resulted in the reading of the Riot Act and mass disturbances on a number of occasions around this time.<sup>146</sup>

Apart from the state sponsored surveillance, local missionaries to the poor were making similar observations upon the working class neighbourhoods and their Irish occupants, similarly linking the depravation and deviance of the areas' occupants to their ethnicity as well as their class. In 1844 the (Protestant) Saint Peter's District Visiting Society's Report noted that:

“In London Apprentice Street, John Street and New Thomas Street, many of the inhabitants of the lowest and most abandoned character are to be found. In fact, this part of the town is notoriously infested with bad characters of every description...The majority of people in the district appear to be living in extreme and abject poverty; brought on I fear by their own neglect, idleness and intemperance. The great number of them keep lodging houses for beggars, the lowest orders of Irish and other loose and disorderly characters.”<sup>147</sup>

The report goes on:

“Others are living three or four families together in a house of two or three rooms, and exhibit a shocking state of filth and misery. The inmates of these wretched abodes seem so utterly depressed by their unhappy circumstances, as to be apparently incapable of making any effort to better their condition in life. The greater number of them profess to being members of the Romish Church, and are willing to generally hear what we say, but respectfully decline in taking our tracts.”<sup>148</sup>

The issue of Bible distribution among the Irish poor of this area would become contentious in later years as the Catholic Fathers responded to increased Protestant proselytations within their flock.

In 1850 the Special Correspondent for the Morning Chronicle reported on the social environmental conditions of the poor in Birmingham. He pointed out the existence of around 2,000 narrow, un-drained and unwholesome courts, many “the perpetual seats of typhus” unsurprisingly as the issue of fresh water provision was an important one.<sup>149</sup>

The correspondent estimated that the population of the courts in Birmingham at this time was no less than 50,000. They were built on a similar model to Liverpool courts but were not as overcrowded “except in one or two districts inhabited by the Irish”.<sup>150</sup>

Fortunately, cellar occupation was almost entirely unknown sparing the Birmingham poor from some of the more desperate conditions suffered by their urban compatriots in other towns and cities at this time.<sup>151</sup> The correspondent visited and described the conditions in two areas associated with the poor Irish, Myrtle Row in Green's Village



and London Prentice Street. He gave a vivid description of the areas and their problems.

Many of the old courts were unpaved and full of puddles of stagnant water and other fluids. Strewn with ash and rotting vegetable matter and “nameless filth”, those who lived there had the use of one “privvy” to a dozen houses. Very few of the courts were provided with water except for a pump in the middle. One area of back to back houses in the Green's Village area had one pump to 53 dwellings. A second pump was broken but the three landlords who owned the dwellings could not agree on its repair. He estimated 300-400 persons relied on the one pump. He interviewed a number of women at the pump and tried the water, (with his nose, it smelt badly of gas and was a greenish colour). The women informed him that they bought all of their drinking water from the “water carriers” at 1/2d a can. This trade had arisen specifically to supply the poor within Birmingham courts with drinking water.<sup>152</sup>

“In one court of houses London Prentice Street, all fully occupied and teeming with dirty and ragged children, there was not a drop of water of any kind for the inhabitants. There was a pump which had been out of repair for some six months and the landlord had refused to mend it. In another court branching off from the same street there was not even a pump and until two years ago there was not a privvy, but on complaint to the Inspector of Nuisances, the landlord had been compelled to erect one.”<sup>153</sup>



Although the conditions of these areas were similar to other towns and cities, where they differed was in scale and extent. Because of Birmingham's relatively good housing and public health situation, those black spots that did exist stood out even more than usual and as the Irish were well represented among the inhabitants of the worse examples of Birmingham slum they were blamed disproportionately for the degradation, destitution and depravity. Because of the conspicuous peculiarity of their presence within these areas they became hegemonically co-joined as a group to the most negative aspects of the Victorian slum. The disappearance after redevelopment of the low class slum districts also coincided with the disappearance of the discernible "Irish Quarter" in the public consciousness. Thus the association of the Irish with deprivation in their definition as an ethnic group by the state and society is made clear.<sup>154</sup>

During the nineteenth century prostitution became a national issue of concern, not only as a social problem but also as a challenge to the political and moral order fed by the fear of venereal disease eventually resulting in the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s. The massive increase in urbanisation and population growth increased demand and supply for the sex trade. As wage labour became more important within the boom and bust cycle of *lassiez-faire* economics unemployment made women vulnerable to the trade. The rise in domestic labour amongst the female workforce (the largest form of female employment at this time) also opened them up to sexual exploitation behind closed doors, dismissal and pregnancy sending many onto the streets with no further means of support other than to turn to prostitution.<sup>155</sup> Some of the areas inhabited by the Irish seemed to be concomitant with the red light district of the Victorian town especially the Inkleys:

“In the police returns above referred to, we find it stated that the number of houses in the borough which are inhabited by prostitutes, or to which prostitutes resort, known to the police, is 314, in addition to 187 houses in which prostitutes lodge. These houses are situated in various parts of the town; but there are some streets in which they abound, and are of a very low description. These are Colmore Street; the streets and courts at the back of the theatre; Smithfield-passage; the Inkleys; Lady-well-walk; Dean-Street; Barford-Street, and Pershore-Street. We have reason to believe that prostitution is very common amongst the females employed in the manufactories in this town. We consider this to be principally owing to the want of proper education and domestic care; the habit of constantly passing through the streets to their employments; and, above all, to the indiscriminate mixing of the sexes in the workshops. We do not, however, find from our own observation and the inquiries which we have made, that the diseases incident to this condition are more common in Birmingham than in other large towns.”<sup>156</sup>

Although opining that prostitution was common among women in the “manufactories” and demonstrating the integration of the “Irish Quarter” with the sex trade area, it seems the female Irish were little involved with the occupation. The Rev. T. Macdonald noted in 1834 that: “There is hardly any prostitution amongst the Irish girls. I do not know a single case” (he also adds that this is the case in the non-Irish part of his flock, possibly a proselytising comment on Catholicism and morality).<sup>157</sup> The Rev. H. Peach in the same report stated that: “There is very little prostitution amongst the Irish girls”.<sup>158</sup> The Rev.



Ignatius Collingridge, resident priest of Saint Chad's remarked: "I think there is less prostitution amongst the Irish in proportion that in any other nation I am acquainted with."<sup>159</sup> Again it is possible that these clergymen would be predisposed to concealing any immorality within their flock. However, there is other evidence to support their claims. John Mouchet Baynham Surgeon of the General Dispensary and of the Town Infirmary of Birmingham noted that:

"My professional knowledge would lead me to think that common prostitution is not as frequent among the Irish women. Diseases which are the result of promiscuous intercourse occur less frequently among the Irish than I should expect, and more among the men than the females. I do not think that incest or unnatural crime is the consequence of them sleeping together promiscuously."<sup>160</sup>

Why the good doctor should "expect" the Irish women to be involved in prostitution is not made clear. But perhaps this demonstrates how expectations drive assumptions in the light of rational fact, the doctor obviously expected the poor Irish to be involved in this paragon of bourgeois abhorrence. Some forty years later Hugh Heinrich noted that: "There are few - very few - Irish women who have sunk to the lowest depths of degradation".<sup>161</sup> Roger Swift argues that the Irish as a whole seemed little interested in this trade and his assertion seems to be born out in Birmingham.<sup>162</sup> The Catholic faith and communal mores may have indeed restricted this route to economic independence.

In conclusion, the nineteenth century saw the expansion of the British economy, the urban centres and migration from countryside to town. This placed great strains on the



infrastructure which was always trying to catch up with exponential growth. Although Birmingham was little different to many other urban areas it was blessed with a relatively benign housing and geographical position in relation to sanitation. For Briggs the economic base of small scale production determined the liberal social structure. However, Briggs's thesis does not take into account the effect of nationalism, anti-Catholicism and other forms of sectarianism between religious groups from the 17th century onwards and how this may have affected minority groups' class positions. Birmingham was at best contingently liberal.

The existence of direct travel routes from Ireland and the military connections may have influenced Irish settlement that, in increasing numbers, began to bring over their friends and family. The first stirrings of a business community were detectable at the end of the 18th century and visible Irish areas began to form at first next to Saint Peter's Catholic Church and then around the 18th century Catholic centre of Park Street with its Catholic chapel. These areas, delineated in part by ethnic clustering, but also by contemporary anxieties relating to class, religion, health, crime and morality that focused attention upon them, continued to expand but the Irish as a whole had by the middle of the century spread to all districts of Birmingham. Although dispersed, within the sources the notion of the Irish area or "Irish Quarter" became in some senses an imaginary construct, ignoring as it did those Irish who were not resident within the worst areas that the Victorian town had to offer. This in turn led to expectations and assumptions of what "being Irish" meant. This was underpinned by anxieties connected to labour competition within the working classes which will now be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> Lampard, E. E., "The Urbanizing World" in Dyos and Wolff, op. cit., pp.4-6.

<sup>2</sup> In many ways Ireland can be included in this definition as its migrants were mainly rural and as Ireland was part of Britain it was therefore part of the British "countryside".

<sup>3</sup> Morris, R. J., and Rodger, R., (eds.), The Victorian City: A Reader in British Urban History 1820-1914, Longman, London, 1993, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Tolley, P. L., "The Birmingham, Aston and Kings Norton Boards of Guardians, and the Politics and Administration of the Poor Law, Circa 1836-1912", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, DeMontfort University, 1994, p.396.

<sup>6</sup> Slaney was one of the Commissioners for inquiring into the sanitary conditions of large towns and populous districts.

<sup>7</sup> "Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of the Large Towns and Populous Districts: Report on the State of Birmingham and Other Towns 1845", British Parliamentary Papers, Health 2, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.14.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Briggs, A., History of Birmingham: Borough and City 1865-1938, Oxford University Press, London, 1952, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.28-9.

<sup>11</sup> Timmins, S., The Resources, Products and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District, Robert Hardwick, London, 1866, passim.

<sup>12</sup> Gas lighting was first demonstrated at Soho in 1802 by the now somewhat forgotten pioneer engineer William Murdock. Ibid, p.221.

<sup>13</sup> Skipp V., The Making of Victorian Birmingham, Brewin, Warwick, 1983, pp.38-9.

<sup>14</sup> Timmins, op. cit., p.207; The Concise Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.III, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.2245.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, E., Capitalism and Slavery, Andre Deutsch, London, 1993, p.82.

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins, E., Birmingham: The First Manufacturing Town in the World: 1760-1840, Weidenfeild and Nicolson, London, 1989, pp. 40-44.

<sup>17</sup> Skipp, op. cit., p.43.



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<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, op. cit., p.43.

<sup>19</sup> The Morning Chronicle, 7 October 1850.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 11 November 1850.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The appellation “Toy” was a generic term to indicate any useful manufactured small metal product and not as we understand the term today.

<sup>23</sup> Skipp, op. cit., p.15.

<sup>24</sup> Birmingham was a centre of opposition to Charles I and supplied weapons and support to the parliamentarians. Gill, C., History of Birmingham: Manor and Borough to 1865, Oxford University Press, London, 1952, p.52.

<sup>25</sup> A noted Baptist and supporter of the anti-Maynooth College endowment campaign in the 1840s. Langford, J. A., Modern Birmingham and its Institutions; A Chronicle of Local Events From 1841-1871, Simkin and Marshall, Birmingham, 1873, p.48.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp.15-26.

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<sup>27</sup> Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Origins, Nature and Extent of Orange Institutions in Great Britain and the Colonies, British Parliamentary Papers, H.L., Vol. XV, 1835, p.43.

<sup>28</sup> Un-attributed quote in Briggs, 1952, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>29</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.73

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp.144-147.

<sup>31</sup> Showell, W., Dictionary of Birmingham, Walter Showell and Sons, Oldbury, 1885, p.244. The Synagogue was also attacked during the Murphy Riots of 1867. Aris's Gazette, 20 June 1867.

<sup>32</sup> Briggs, 1952, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>33</sup> Briggs, 1964, op. cit., p.223.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp.223-239.

<sup>35</sup> See Morning Chronicle, 25 November 1850.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in McKenna, J., "The Irish in Birmingham", unpublished manuscript, 1991, p.5. I am grateful to Joseph McKenna for allowing me to use his work.

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<sup>37</sup> B.C.A., DRO, 41, Aston Church Warden's Accounts, 1644-1689.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> B.C.A., DRO, 41, Northfield's Church Wardens' Accounts, 1644-1689.

<sup>40</sup> B.C.A., DRO, 22, King's Norton Church Wardens' Accounts, 1644-89.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.73

<sup>42</sup> B.C.A., MS 656/16, 113th Regiment of Foot, Correspondence, Receipts, Accounts and Other Papers 1793-1797, Letter to Colonel Macdonell, 9 March 1795.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> B. C. L., L90., Franciscan Registers, 1763-1800.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sketchley's Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall Directory, Sketchley, Birmingham, 1767.



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<sup>47</sup> Sketchley's and Adam's Tradesmen's True Guide: Or an Universal Directory for the Towns of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley and the Manufacturing Villages in the Neighbourhood of Birmingham, Sketchley, Birmingham, 1770.

<sup>48</sup> The Birmingham Directory or Merchant and Tradesman's Useful Companion, Pearson and Rolleson, Birmingham, 1777.

<sup>49</sup> McKenna, op. cit., p.9.

<sup>50</sup> "1861-1871 Census of England and Wales", British Parliamentary Papers, Population 15, Irish University Press, Dublin, 1970, p.155; p.162; "Census of England and Wales, 1871", op. cit., p.342. The reluctance of local women to enter service may be an explanation of this anomaly, Irish women possibly taking up the work, as "Domestic Service is generally shunned by town girls, and most of our housemaids are importations". Although Denvir does talk of Irish women being employed in factory work. Wright, J. S. "On the Employment of Women in Factories in Birmingham", Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, Vol. 1., J. W. Parker and Son, London, 1857, p.542; Denvir, op. cit., p.260.

<sup>51</sup> Thirteenth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, Charles Knight, London, 1847, p.8.

<sup>52</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.124

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<sup>53</sup> O'Tuathaigh, op. cit., p.152. See also *ibid*, pp.124-5.

<sup>54</sup> Chartes, J. A., and Turnbull, L. G., "Road Transport" in Aldcroft, D., and Freeman, M., (eds.), Transport in the Industrial Revolution, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983, pp.64-100.

<sup>55</sup> Aston Church Warden's Accounts, op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> Duckham, D. F., "Canals and River Navigation", in Aldcroft and Freeman, op. cit., pp.100-142.

<sup>57</sup> Gill, op. cit., pp.283-89.

<sup>58</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855". British Parliamentary Papers, Poor Law 23, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Franciscan Registers, 1763-1800, op. cit.

<sup>60</sup> Royal Commission on the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, Appendix G., "The State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain: No 1, The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", British Parliamentary Papers, XXXIV, 1407, 1836, p.475.

<sup>61</sup> The Nation, 7 June 1856.

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<sup>62</sup> Denvir, op. cit., pp.415-416, and p.259.

<sup>63</sup> The Nation, 7 June 1856.

<sup>64</sup> Zeisler, K. I., "The Irish in Birmingham 1830-1970", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989, pp.50-1.

<sup>65</sup> Chinn, 1999, op. cit., pp.64-70.

<sup>66</sup> Fox, A. W., Agricultural Statistics, 1900, quoted in Morgan, D. H., Harvesters and Harvesting 1840-1900, Croom Helm, London, 1982, p.82.

<sup>67</sup> Finnegan, op. cit., pp.50-1; Zeisler, op. cit., pp.69-70.

<sup>68</sup> "1861-1871 Census of England and Wales", op. cit., pp.155, 162.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p.339.

<sup>70</sup> Duggan, E., The Impact of Industrialisation on an Urban Labour Market, Garland, London, 1988, p.157.

<sup>71</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.481; B.C.A, MSS 312749, The Journal of Thomas Augustin Finigan: Missionary, Birmingham Town Mission 1837-1838, 27 August, 1837.



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<sup>72</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.478.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp.479-80.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p.127.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.475.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.479.

<sup>77</sup> The Nation, 28 June 1856.

<sup>78</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.126.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.119.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.120.

<sup>81</sup> “Minutes Given in Evidence Before the Select Committee on Irish and Scottish Vagrants”, British Parliamentary Papers, 1828, H.L., Vol.VI, p.12.

<sup>82</sup> “Report from the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants”, British Parliamentary Papers, 1833, H.L., Vol. XVI, p.3.

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<sup>83</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.120.

<sup>84</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants", op. cit., pp.34-9.

<sup>85</sup> Gave birth. The Poor Law forced pregnant destitute women to be removed to the parish of their birth, that parish being deemed responsible for the child and mother's upkeep.

<sup>86</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants, 1833, op. cit., p.363. A Total of 5,981 Vagrants were passed through Staffordshire in 1831 at a cost of £1,897 16s 4d. The average expense per-annum between 1828 and 1832 was £1,678 in Staffordshire and £958 in Warwickshire. Ibid., p.365.

<sup>87</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", 1834, op. cit., p.477.

<sup>88</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.14.

<sup>90</sup> Although fairly evenly dispersed, by 1851 there were significant concentrations of Irish in certain streets and areas other than what became associated as the "Irish Quarter". Chinn, 1999, op. cit., p.58.

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<sup>91</sup> For instance, Chinn points out that the Irish born population of London Prentice Street was nearly 50% of all inhabitants. If their English born children were included this figure would become nearly 67%. Ibid, p.59.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.58. Chinn disputes this number.

<sup>93</sup> B.R.L., Printed Census for Birmingham, 1841-1881, Also "1861-1871 Census of England and Wales", op. cit., p.160.

<sup>94</sup> Darwall, op. cit., p.111.

<sup>95</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit, p.475.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p.478.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.480.

<sup>98</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.11.

<sup>99</sup> The Nation, 28 June 1856.

<sup>100</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.260.

<sup>101</sup> O'Day, 1990, op. cit., p.ix.



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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.xx.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.xxii.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.i..

<sup>105</sup> The 1871 Census figure was 9,076 Irish born. Heinrick invariably included children, grandchildren, Catholic, Protestant, and those of mixed ancestry. Ibid., p.41.

<sup>106</sup> Tolley, op. cit., p.396.

<sup>107</sup> Green, D. R., and Parton, A.G., "Slums and Slum Life in Victorian England", in Gaskell, M., (ed.), Slums, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1990, p.40.

<sup>108</sup> Darwall had made similar comments in 1828. Darwall, op. cit., pp.108-111; Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry Report on the State of the Public Health in the Borough of Birmingham, British Parliamentary Papers, H.L., Vol. XXVI, 1842, p.32.

<sup>109</sup> Zeisler, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>110</sup> One court off Hill Street being nearly entirely Irish. Ibid, p.27.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, pp.27-8; Chinn, 1999, op. cit., p.58.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Zeisler, op. cit., pp.28-9. Chinn points out the differentiating concentrations of Irish in 1851 ranging from 0.7% of the population in the All Saints and Ladywood areas, up to almost 5% of the populous in the central districts of the town. Chinn, 1999, op. cit., p.58.

<sup>115</sup> 394 as opposed to 357. Ibid, p.59.

<sup>116</sup> Livery Street was close but not adjacent to London Prentice Street. However, it was a large open street with over double the population of London Prentice Street, the Irish born making up 25% of all residents, and therefore not associated with the worse problems of the central slums and the concentration of Irish born - 46.5% in London Prentice Street. Chinn points out that if their offspring were included nearly two thirds of London Prentice Street inhabitants could be considered Irish. Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population; Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry, 1842, op. cit., pp.197-8.

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<sup>118</sup> Darwall, op. cit., p.100. See appendix 1.

<sup>119</sup> Rawlinson, H., Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Enquiry in to the Sewage, Drainage and Supply of Water and the Sanitary Conditions of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Birmingham, W. Clowes and Sons, HMSO, 1849, p.83.

<sup>120</sup> Heslop, T. P., "The Medical Aspects of Birmingham" in Timmins, op. cit., p.696.

<sup>121</sup> B.C.A., MS 1408, Papers Relating to Farther Arthur Leeson Chatterway: Photocopies of Printed Articles With Drawings and Photographs: Roman Catholic Missions in Birmingham.

<sup>122</sup> Park Street had the greatest concentration of Roman Catholics in Birmingham as early as 1767. Champ, J., "Saint Martin's Parish Birmingham in 1767: A Study of Urban Catholicism", Recusant History, 15, 1979-1981, pp.343-8.

<sup>123</sup> Briggs, 1952, op. cit., pp.12-13.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, pp.11-16; Rawlinson, op. cit., p.83; Heslop, op. cit., p.696.

<sup>125</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>126</sup> Davis refers briefly to this reification of the poor slum dwelling Irish into a universal



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representation of the Irish as a group that has resonances up to and within the present British public discourse on Irishness. Davis op. cit., pp.51-2.

<sup>127</sup> For a more detailed history of this element of nineteenth century prejudice see MacRaild, 1999, op. cit., pp.156-60.

<sup>128</sup> Keirnan, R. H., The Story of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, Joseph Wares, West Bromwich, [1950], p.2. The street was named after a local inn, this area is sometimes referred to as London Prentice or London Apprentice Street.

<sup>129</sup> "Where the low Irish congregate" as Darwall puts it, showing the preoccupation with their class position making them noteworthy as a group. Darwall, op. cit., p.109. There is only one mention of the middle class Irish in any text so far discovered. This is the brief mention of a meeting of the Birmingham Home Rule Association in 1876 reported in the Liverpool based Irish nationalist paper the United Irishman. The meeting was held at the White Horse public house Birmingham for the purpose of re-organizing the Home Rule Association of Birmingham. Hugh Heinrich was in the chair and there was a good attendance. A letter of support from Canon Ivers was read out. A motion to canvass "all well to do Irishmen of the town to become honorary members of the association" was passed. Also present was Honorary Secretary W. Hogan and a Captain Kirwan. United Irishman, 4 November 1876.

<sup>130</sup> Darwall, op. cit., pp.108-9.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>135</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit, p.479.

<sup>136</sup> Typically the report links bad smells to bad health in the miasmic discourse on health prevalent at the time.

<sup>137</sup> "Reports From Select Committees on the Health of Towns and the Effect of Internment of Bodies in Towns With Minutes of Evidence Appendices and Indices 1840-42", British Parliamentary Papers, Health General 2, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, pp.176-180. (Sometimes referred to as the Slaney Report).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, pp.136-8.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p.180.

<sup>140</sup> Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population; Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.197.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> A noted Irish occupation in Birmingham.

<sup>143</sup> Free vaccination was provided through the Poor Law but remained a controversial practice, often seen as an imposition of central government thereby undermining individual freedom of choice, perhaps a resonant argument within a liberal town. However, it was more probably an ignorance and fear of the medicine that dissuaded the poor from taking up the inoculation. Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population; Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.198.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p.197.

<sup>145</sup> Hobsbawm, E. J., The Age of Revolution, Europe 1789-1848, Sphere Books, London, 1973, pp.164-5.

<sup>146</sup> Gill, op. cit., pp.223, 247-53.

<sup>147</sup> B.R.L., Birmingham Institutions, D.6., Report of Saint Peter's District Visiting Society, L. Brierly, Birmingham, 1844, pp.3-4. Gilley argues that this attitude to poverty was linked to a reformist Protestant world view. Gilley, S., "Vulgar Piety and the Brompton Oratory, 1850-1860", in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., p.256.



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<sup>148</sup> The visitors called on 300 families and distributed the Bible and other tracts as well as 200 "relief tickets". Report of Saint Peter's District Visiting Society, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>149</sup> Morning Chronicle, 14 October 1850.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> See Jackson, op. cit., pp.45-47.

<sup>152</sup> Morning Chronicle, 14 October 1850.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Louise Miskell points out how the Irish "areas" in Camborne Cornwall were constructed in memory rather than reality by the 1880s. Miskell, L., "Irish immigrants in Cornwall: The Camborne Experience, 1861-82", in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., pp.39-40.

<sup>155</sup> Walkowitz, J. R., Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women Class and the State, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, pp.1-31.

<sup>156</sup> Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population; Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Inquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.198.

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<sup>157</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.477.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.480.

<sup>161</sup> Heinrick, op. cit., p.43.

<sup>162</sup> Swift, R., "Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain", in Swift and Gilley, 1989, op. cit., p.175.

### **Chapter 3.**

#### **The Labouring Irish.**

The engagement of the Irish with the British economy is an important issue in the delineation of ethnic prejudice. Expanding national economies need to draw resources from the periphery to the core. Labour and skills are the most important of resources for burgeoning industries, therefore, labour migration is fundamental to economic growth and indeed modernity. The received notion has been that the Irish were clustered at the bottom of the British economic order, undercutting wages and taking jobs from local residents. This in turn generated hostilities from the native worker and resulted in a foregrounding of ethnic/national allegiance rather than a class consciousness amongst the British workforce. As such, the Irish became hegemonically co-joined to low class wage suppression and labour competition, creating a potentially rich discursive seam for anti-Irish prejudice amongst the working class. The reality of Irish engagement with the economy was far more complex than this. Again, it is the lower class migrant who is distinguished as the problem within the sources, even though middle class Irish artisans and businessmen and women were active in nineteenth century Britain and Birmingham. The presence of an ethno-national group in competition with native labour helped cement the boundaries of difference between the two groups, in turn reinforcing the national and ethnic contrasts that were the common conceptual currency of the period. This view of migrants taking economic wealth from the native worker is still a strong argument within contemporary racist dialogue foregrounding the long term importance of an economic basis for discrimination in expanding the racist discourse to the masses.



Between 1815 and 1914 Britain was the supreme world economic power. The first nation to industrialise, with the finest naval fleet in the world, the foremost colonial empire covering a quarter of the earth and its population. Britain in the nineteenth century expanded its industrial base at an unprecedented rate. The ease of supply and access to coal, capital, labour and overseas markets fostered the industrial revolution as it spread from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, generating new wealth enabling Britain to become the major investor in the expanding world economy. British technology was also dominant up until at least the mid nineteenth century driving on expansion with new products, processes and markets. In 1860, with only 2% of the world's population and 10% of Europe's, Britain dominated 40-45% of the world's trade and 55-60% of the continental commerce. During the whole of this period Britain was the richest nation with the highest GDP per capita, providing credit to the world.<sup>1</sup>

This new economic preeminence and explosive expansion provided new opportunities for those immigrants and migrants that possessed the knowledge, showed the will and had the capital to make the journey from Ireland to the burgeoning urban centers. As the economic and demographic expansion of Britain moved forward, the developments in the national economy not only demanded improvements in industry and manufacture, but also in services such as agriculture, finance, education, construction and communications. All spheres of the economy demanded labour that could not always be supplied locally. Labour was demanded and it was found at home and abroad.

According to W. W. Rostow the British economy of the nineteenth century went through a number of phases. The first was between 1790 and 1815, the period of the Napoleonic Wars. This epoch was characterised by increased production in industry and agriculture with a good trade balance. However, it was also a time of bad harvests and population increase. The rise in the price of commodities caused by the dislocation of foreign trade led to growth in the agricultural sector, with a diversion of national resources into shipping, arms and other military consumables. 3-5% of the population were in the armed forces and large amounts of resources were sent abroad at a time of virtual monopoly of the West-Indian trade, exports rising by an average of 10.96% as the terms of world trade shifted towards Britain.

The second broad economic period was between 1815 and 1847, characterised by an increase in production and wages. Peace brought investment back to wholly productive speculations, concentrated in high return, cost reducing industries and transport infrastructure such as roads, bridges and railways. Brick production boomed, increasing at 2.8% per annum signaling a burst of growth in the construction industry. However, social conditions were bad with increasing unemployment, the bad harvests and high food prices creating great suffering in the "Hungry Forties", especially in Ireland with its regular famines ending in the Great Famine of the late 1840s. These agronomic problems were in part determined by the decline in agriculture that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars as well as devastating crop failures due to weather and disease. These setbacks were bad enough, but they came at a time of swiftly expanding populations throughout Britain and Ireland. Despite these social dislocations, the

economy itself was expanding expeditiously. Rostow describes this epoch as the swiftest period of development for the British economy in the nineteenth century.

The third period delineated by Rostow is often described as "The Mid-Victorian Boom" between 1850 and 1873. This interval was characterised by rising real wages from the 1860s, increased capital export, especially overseas involvement in railways, providing large returns for the economy. Despite some cyclical set backs in the mid 60s and early 70s, the period between 1868 and 1873 in particular was one of rich expansion for the British economy. The fourth era was from 1873 to 1898 - often called "The Great Depression" - and was characterised by the development of steel, machine tools, telephones and electricity. Despite this era's negative appellative, this was a period when the terms of international trade shifted to Britain's favour with falling interest rates and commodity prices along with rising internal investment and real wages.<sup>2</sup>

The economy in Birmingham was of course affected by the national economic cycles. Previous to 1793 commerce expanded greatly, especially the trade in buckles, buttons and arms as has been explored. However, with the outbreak of war with France, Birmingham's important export trade was disrupted and dislocated by twenty years of conflict. After 1807 foreign trade was forbidden exacerbating economic difficulties - the export trade being as important as the home market at this time.<sup>3</sup> Bad harvests at the turn of the century coupled with a rising population led to an upsurge in corn prices and food riots broke out in Birmingham in 1795 and 1800. The depression of 1812 and the immediate post-war downturn in 1817 led to great distress and high



unemployment, exacerbated by the large numbers of Napoleonic veterans entering the civilian economy looking for work.<sup>4</sup> The general depression carried forward to the mid 1830s (1826 being particularly bad), the period between 1833 and 1836 brought a return to prosperity. However, from 1837 the economy entered a downward cycle with considerable distress in 1838 and 1842-3.<sup>5</sup> At this time average wages in the toy trade halved and pawnbrokers ran out of capital to lend.<sup>6</sup> 1848 was also a bad year but the start of the mid-Victorian boom led to the economy entering into a prolonged cycle of improvement apart from a bad year in 1855, a year when Irish labourers suffered as we shall see, and the world recession of the late 1850s.<sup>7</sup> Although the Birmingham economy was essentially moribund between 1815-1840 - as was the national one - the population still rose by two and a half times the national average.<sup>8</sup> The mid-Victorian period became a time of relative stability, despite serious recessions in specific trades, and productivity improved while prices and wages remained stable.<sup>9</sup> The era of prosperity lasted until the 1880s with the 1870s being particularly prosperous in Birmingham and Britain as a whole. However, in 1876 the town was hit by recession and unemployment as the national economy faltered.<sup>10</sup> Although the commercial sector carried on prosperously through the era of the so-called "Great Depression", the adaptability and diversity of Birmingham's industrial sector underpinned this robustness; some trade or other was always in ascension when others declined.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, the vagaries of trade cycles hardly affected the continuing expansion of the economy and population of nineteenth century Britain. Within this unprecedented inflation of the national economy, new trades, skills and technologies, mainly based in the urban centers, sucked in labour from home and abroad. The peripheral, mainly rural nature of the

Irish economy meant there was an easily exploitable work supply at close hand when labour shortages became apparent. The stresses of population rise, crop failure, land tenure and political changes in Ireland pushed the poor - and not so poor - landless Irish towards emigration as a life choice, facilitated by transport innovations such as steam powered shipping. Those that came to England, Scotland and Wales perhaps envisaged their move as a temporary sojourn, or one step on a greater emigration to the New World and elsewhere, but many settled and began to work.

The most popular interpretation of how Irish labour helped foster the nineteenth century British economy foregrounds its availability as a large reservoir of competitively priced labour - flexible and mobile at a time of rapid economic expansion - thereby, it is argued, greatly contributing to the economic wealth of the British nation. This classic argument emphasises two points. Firstly, the detrimental effect of cheap Irish labour upon the wages of indigenous workers (due to the competition introduced) thereby suppressing wage inflation. And secondly, the increase in the supply and flexibility of labour during periods of high demand. Within this context, some modern commentators have seen the undercutting of the host communities' interests regarding wages and conditions as pejorative towards inter-ethnic relations and instrumental in the fostering of the Irish communities' exclusion.<sup>12</sup> It is argued that the Irish were able to undercut their competitors due to their low living standards, high mobility and lack of labour organisation. Stressing their sensitivity to market demand, John Denvir remarked at the end of the century that "when a slackness of trade arises, the Irish are generally the first to feel the pinch, and goes elsewhere in search of employment."<sup>13</sup> Employers looking for flexible workers at the most competitive rates



would find these attributes of mobility and availability attractive. Other researchers have revised this argument of the Irish lowering wages and conditions via an economic model that suggests they actually played a fairly marginal part in fostering industrialisation and wage restraint. The arguments that the Irish were somehow predisposed to dirty hard work as opposed to other labourers and were uniquely mobile, have been shown to be flawed, as has the reserve labour pool idea if one remembers that it was usual for there to be an oversupply of unskilled labour in the nineteenth century. Over 50% of the population of Birmingham in 1851 were born elsewhere; 7,000 in Ireland and 63,000 in the UK. The idea of their “indispensability to British capitalism” has been put down to special pleading by employers who knew they would work for less and in inferior conditions.<sup>14</sup>

Whatever the reality of the Irish contribution to the expansion of the nineteenth century economy and their role in wage restraint, contemporary accounts confirm the proposition that there was a strong feeling among masters and workers that the Irish were undercutting the local labour force in terms of wages and conditions and that employers benefited from the presence of a cheap labour supply willing to work in occupations shunned by others. This in turn would impact on the Irish as a group. Perceived by their working class English competitors as strike breakers and wage cutters, the anti-immigrant/Irish discourse was thereby easily expanded into the masses by political entrepreneurs and others. This said, Redford notes the niche that Irish workers filled in occupying those forms of employment that were not attractive to the indigenous labour force. Trades such as hawking, street trading and stall-keeping,<sup>15</sup> the custody of lodging and beer-houses, the collecting and selling of firewood as well as



rag and bones, dirty, dangerous, unpleasant and labourious industrial work and huckstering, begging and petty criminality, were all signified by him as Irish pursuits.<sup>16</sup> This conception of Irish economic engagement was prevalent in Birmingham in the 1830s. The Rev. Ignatius Collingridge of Saint Chad's Birmingham noted in 1834: "I don't know who would do the hard work of the town, such as mortar making, brick making etc. if it was not for the Irish."<sup>17</sup> James Holmes, plasterer of Birmingham noted that "If it was not for the Irish we could not get the work done...the English labourers don't like the Irish; they say if it was not for them they would have good wages."<sup>18</sup> He also commented that it would not be advantageous to the town and neighborhood to prevent their migration, that the harvest and other work in the town could not be done without them and that the wages of the indigenous labourers would be considerably higher.<sup>19</sup> Certainly many conflicts between immigrant Irish and the resident English during this period were articulated around issues of access to work and the undercutting of wages.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of Irish class position within the labour force is by no means entirely clear. The long held supposition of them being concentrated in the low-skill, casual labour end of the job market, while somewhat typical, is not the whole picture as contemporary Irish nationalists Hugh Henrick and John Denvir were at pains to point out. Both emphasised advancements in upward mobility amongst the Irish from mid to late century, but acknowledged the geographic specificity of such advancement.<sup>21</sup> The condition of the newly arrived immigrant was important in determining their status and employability. Many were illiterate and low skilled, some speaking only Irish, with a rural sensibility, the challenges of adapting to the educated, skilled, urban job market

would have been great. Other possible problems faced by the Irish immigrant include the relative under funding of Catholic schools, the high importance given to leisure activities such as drinking, contempt for authority that had been bred as part of British imperial occupation of Ireland and an alleged otherworldly disenchantment with materialism bred by their Catholic faith.<sup>22</sup> As many were from rural areas with the attitudes outlined - the undeveloped agricultural district of Connaught in Western Ireland would be a good example and was the centre of Irish emigration to Birmingham - they were perceived by many contemporary bourgeois commentators as having a detrimental effect on the English working class with whom they rubbed shoulders in the urban environment.<sup>23</sup> The historical sources also tend to draw us to the low end of the labour market with the preponderance of government reports dealing with vagrants, the poor and sanitary conditions of the Victorian town and city, as well as the views of contemporary commentators such as Charles Booth, Frederick Engels and others of local and national importance. The perception of the Irish as low skilled, unruly, insanitary carriers of disease and moral turpitude, and culturally pre-disposed to violence was, according to Sheridan Gilley, only one side of the stereotype and not the whole story.<sup>24</sup> Positive Irish stereotypes exist according to Gilley, although outside of Irish nationalist writings and the comments of employers benefiting from cheap Irish labour, there are very few in regard to the Birmingham Irish.

In terms of the early class position of the Irish in Birmingham, in 1834, speaking to the Report on the Irish Poor in Britain the, Rev. T. MacDonald of Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church opined that:



“Compared to the English the Irish belong to a very low class...I attribute their poverty to their want of means of rising, to the national and religious prejudice against them...and to their recklessness...They are principally employed for their manual labour; they are rarely employed in departments that require considerable mechanised skill. I think there are a few cases where a poor Irishman has raised himself to business.”<sup>25</sup>

He also records that “they are not as good managers as the English; they don’t live equally well on equal wages; they don’t aspire to the same comforts. They live more for the present moment.”<sup>26</sup> The lowly position of the emerging community is foregrounded in many of the statements in the report. These descriptions of perceived low aspiration, lack of economic skills and different consumption patterns are all indicative of the Irish migrant’s cultural contrasts to the English population and also their rural backgrounds (although many English in the new towns and cities were from similar environments). In contrast, the Irish from the more economically developed and urbanised north are “generally speaking, more managing and thinking than the others: generally they are in rather comfortable circumstances.”<sup>27</sup> Some of these northern Irish may well have been Protestants as well. The Rev. Peach agreed with the conception of the Irish as poor managers of domestic economy: “The English in my flock are more provident than the Irish, although they have settlements in the Parish.”<sup>28</sup> The Rev. Collingridge also agrees that he never knew an instance of the Irish setting up a shop.<sup>29</sup> The idea that the Irish were all of low status was false as shall be demonstrated.



W. R. Jones has written about cultural stereotyping of the Irish, Scottish and Welsh by the English linked to their national differences. Included in these are the noted Celtic economic pattern of consuming harvests (rather than investing them in the sense of storage) and distributing surplus freely as largesse, the antithesis of the acquisitive work ethic typical of liberal Protestant English economy. In this sense it can be seen that the rural Irish, not acculturated to the English urban economic configuration, are criticised and classified by their host observers for the lack of these skills essential to economic advancement in the new urban industrial society. The notion of living for the moment is especially indicative of the critique, rural cultures having different notions of time and leisure.<sup>30</sup> The propensity to distribute and remit wealth to compatriots and family at home and in Ireland at times of distress has already been noted. The Rev. MacDonald referred to the cultural difference in domestic economy and how the Irish were beginning to acculturate to their new situation in the town affecting aspirations and habits. "I think their mixture with the English raises their habits of economy and increases their love of comfort, but deteriorates their morality."<sup>31</sup> The Irish are also compared unfavourably with the Italian community in Birmingham. The Rev. Collingridge notes that "I have some Italians in my flock, perhaps twelve families, who come over poor and have raised themselves to comparative affluence as tradesmen. No Irish have raised themselves in the same manner as the Italians." He goes on to note that the occupations of Italians did not put them in such competition with the poor English, and that they were not so feared "as a body" so experienced less prejudice and presumably discrimination.<sup>32</sup> This foregrounds the links between job competition, ethnicity and hostility, the Irish having extra signifiers of difference linked to violent agrarian and national struggles - as well as numbers - that the Italian community did not have to bare.

The Irish were not only to be found in the subaltern stratas of the workforce. Artisan and professional classes of Irish were to be found throughout the towns and cities of Britain in the nineteenth century. Occupations included tailors, masons, cobblers, merchants, carpenters and many other semi and skilled workers as well as professional occupations such as journalism, education, law and medicine. Along with these professions, commercial and trading ventures were cultivated and expanded.<sup>33</sup> Within the Victorian town and city the social mobility of the Irish was not static, as the immigrants settled and established themselves, a proportion moved up the social scale and no doubt some slid back. Although most Irish were unskilled with little or no capital at their disposal, concentrated in the lower stratas of the labour force, there were some first generation immigrants who had the capital to set themselves up in a trade or business and succeed.<sup>34</sup> The problems in determining the exact amounts and spatial distribution of upwardly mobile migrants are those usually encountered with this group, especially the obstacles of Irish born being the only discernible group on the census making second and following generations hard to perceive and the inherent peripatetic nature of the group. However, in general, it is probably safe to say that the Irish tended to be conservative in their occupational structure, remaining at the bottom end of the labour market, perhaps linked to their residential and kinship network patterns and possibly language and religious restrictions in some cases.<sup>35</sup> Once gaining a foothold in an area/trade, ethnic, religious and residential ties reinforced the Irish component of the occupation. It has also been suggested that the high rate of illiteracy amongst Irish immigrants could have been a factor in restricted mobility, occupational or otherwise.<sup>36</sup> One issue was the existence of sectarian recruitment strategies;



particularly where there was a strong local presence of Protestant employers and especially Orange Order members in the labour market.<sup>37</sup> Although there was a number of lodges in Birmingham during this period, it does not seem that they were as influential as in Glasgow or Liverpool. Certainly more work is needed on examining social mobility of the Irish over the whole of the nineteenth century. What we do know is that the social, political and economic makeup of the receiving community affected the socioeconomic mobility of the Irish. The basis and diversity of the local economy, coupled with the access - restricted by skill shortages or otherwise - to openings in the labour market and the knowledge of opportunities and access to capital all effected the economic stratification of the Irish immigrant labour market.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of historiographical debates about Irish labour migration and engagement in Britain, the perception of the Irish as economically subaltern within the newly expanding urban economy, thereby providing a cheap mobile labour pool to be drawn on at will, undercutting wages and conditions for indigenous labour which in turn resulted in conflict was the received wisdom of the time. As far as the contemporary accounts in Birmingham are concerned, these arguments were received, believed and acted upon, affecting the experiences and class mobility of the Irish immigrant. But, as we shall see, as the century progressed they would become less relevant to Birmingham where local economic conditions determined somewhat the immigrant experience.

The influence on economic development of the socially and politically tolerant liberal tradition in Birmingham had also been noted since at least the seventeenth century with



dissenters, Quakers and heretics welcome in the town. It has been argued that this tolerance coupled with the lack of trade unions, guilds and an extensive apprentice system, engendered a flexible workforce within a liberal free trade economic context able to move with relative ease between industries as the vagaries of fashion and trade cycles opened up and closed down business and enterprise. This mobility and adaptability of the workforce was certainly useful in the expansion of the consumable metal goods trade - a trade that became synonymous with Birmingham in the nineteenth century as has been explored earlier. With its sectional craft based method susceptible to the vagaries of supply and demand within the consumer markets, the evidence suggests that as one trade suffered recession others expanded alleviating the economic downturns that the century offered to business and manufacturing. Although metalworking was a major industry, the town and city's heterogeneity in manufacturing as well as its role in the commercial and service sectors for the whole region, meant Birmingham possessed a large diversified economy effective in mitigating the pernicious effects of trade slumps in particular sectors of the economy. Thus, Birmingham was never wholly dependent on any one trade.<sup>39</sup>

Birmingham grew rapidly during the period of the industrial revolution and into the late nineteenth century. The workforce of Birmingham expanded by approximately 800% between 1760 and 1840 creating a demand for immigrant workers and a need to train them. In 1801, the population was close to 71,000 and by 1841 this had risen to 183,000. Inhabitants of Birmingham rose to 344,000 by 1871 and 522,000 by 1901.<sup>40</sup> The annual percentage rise in population was averaging nearly 30% per decade between 1841 and 1861. There were 40,00 houses in 1841, nearly 49,000 in 1851,

over 59,000 in 1861, just under 75,000 in 1871 and nearly 80,000 in 1881.<sup>41</sup> Much piecework was done at home, with children and young people employed, many workshops situated within the home or a converted dwelling most employing between 5 and 30 workers. As already noted the social and economic relations between master and workers are said to have been close with a relatively open structure of class mobility - up and down. This specific economic and social structure marked out Birmingham as distinct from the great industrial towns of the north.<sup>42</sup> As explored in chapter two, the economic heart of Birmingham in the nineteenth century was beating to the sound of hammers on anvils, the Birmingham metalwork trade becoming by mid-century the leading British manufacturer of guns, brass-work, jewellery, buttons, pins and screws with 97 different trades and up to 2,100 firms in 1840, a situation that was almost peerless.<sup>43</sup>

Within this economy the Irish worked in all these occupations. The Rev. Peach noted that the Irish were employed in the metal trade as strikers in 1834.<sup>44</sup> Zeisler recorded in her census samples of 1851 and 1881 Irish penetration of the gun and metal trades.<sup>45</sup> James Moor of Park Street worked as a gun screwer and was sent to the Moor Street cells for throwing a stone at the Mayor of Birmingham during the Murphy Riots of 1867.<sup>46</sup> Irishman John Kelly of Thomas Street was a bell caster in 1874.<sup>47</sup> The register of the Catholic Sick Club records Irish named individuals engaged in 102 different trades between 1800 and 1880 including 34 trades related to metal working and eight different trades directly connected with the armaments industry.<sup>48</sup>



Other trades of note included the manufacture of nails, flint glass, papier-mâché, locks, boiler plate, chemicals, soap, pins, needles, screws, hinges and fish hooks, brassware for the home (by 1840 Birmingham led the world in this trade), navy and railway brassware markets, saddlery, electro-plating, optical and mathematical instruments, coinage, die sinking, rope making, wire drawing, pewter, pen enameling, tools, umbrella frames, matches and coffin furniture amongst many others.<sup>49</sup> According to Timmins, the trades of Birmingham were so numerous in 1865 that they could not be documented fully in his seminal book.<sup>50</sup>

As well as these industries, the trade and service sectors were important in finding markets and supplying services at home and abroad. The provision of housing, clothing, food, transport and professional services such as banking, accountancy, legal and medical work as well as local government, police force, civil servants, were all employing larger numbers of people as the town expanded into the city era. Capital was thin on the ground in the early nineteenth century as the small-scale production base in constant competition presented few opportunities for high returns on investments. Six banks were specialising in lending to certain trades as well as issuing paper notes and other services. The Bank of England established a Birmingham branch in 1827 becoming the preeminent player in the market by the 1850s. Businesses also benefited from the rise in capital generated by the aforementioned formation of joint-stock banks and the role of advocacy and administration provided by the Birmingham Exchange and Chamber of Commerce.<sup>51</sup>



Birmingham's geographic domination of the Midlands was fostered and extended by its communication links as have already been explored. Along with the presence of many Irish harvesters near Birmingham, the use of Irish navvies in the expansion of transport infrastructure in the Midlands region is important. These occupations acted as precursors for the arrival of Irish migrants into the town as they engendered knowledge of routes and opportunities within the area.

Of all the occupations pursued by the Irish in nineteenth century Britain, perhaps the archetype - and certainly the most ubiquitous - was that of the peripatetic seasonal harvester. The tradition of harvesting was a long one stretching back to the Middle Ages, where the sojourning Irish labourer conveniently ameliorated labour shortages at the time of harvest. Although welcomed and encouraged by farmers and landowners, the migration of harvesters from Ireland stimulated controversy and sometimes violence among the English population who certainly saw them as competitors in labour and wages, along with antipathies generated by a mix of national and religious prejudice. Nevertheless, the Irish harvester came and went, some settling near their work so that by the end of the eighteenth century this sojournal migration had turned into large-scale settlement.<sup>52</sup>

Irish Harvesting continued throughout the century; some of these people would decide to settle and it was this original migration that set many of the routes and precedents for others to follow. In 1861 there were 47,571 Irish born resident in the West-Midland counties and 14,297 in Warwickshire alone and by 1871 there were still 11,569 in that county.<sup>53</sup> Between 1770 and 1860 two to two and a half percent of labourers in Warwickshire were Irish born.<sup>54</sup> Hugh Heinrich, writing in the 1870s, remarked that

north and northeast of London through the Midlands, harvesters were widely dispersed.<sup>55</sup> John Denvir, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, pointed out the importance of the seasonal Irish harvester in Cambridgeshire where some farmers would pay the passage from Ireland of their seasonal labourers.<sup>56</sup> He further commented on the origins of the Irish seasonal migrants and their propensity to settle in the Midlands.<sup>57</sup> He also states that in Staffordshire, just north of Birmingham in the districts of Rugely, Lichfeild and Tamworth, a small settled Irish population was swelled each year by harvesters and that most of the Irish were agricultural labourers.<sup>58</sup>

The harvester was an important figure in both the English and Irish rural economies. However, the Irish harvester was low skilled in agricultural terms with little capital and finding the search for accommodation difficult due to the reluctance of local landlords to house them. This coupled with the lack of any non-seasonal labour shortages in the countryside meant they seldom settled on the land itself but were restricted to harvest work, cutting corn, digging potatoes, turnips or picking hops – if they did settle it was mainly in the urban centres. They were usually smallholders who farmed in Ireland during the spring and late autumn, coming to Britain in the summer to help subsidise their rents.<sup>59</sup>

A number of famines in Ireland during the 1780s as well as the dislocations of the 1798 rebellion stimulated seasonal migration. At the same time the economy of the Lancashire manufactories was expanding drawing in labour from home and abroad.<sup>60</sup> The Napoleonic Wars mitigated migration from Ireland along with the subsequent development of Irish agriculture up to 1815 (also stimulated by the encouragement of tillage and the expansion of land holdings that the advent of the Corn Laws brought about), despite a famine and the



turmoil and unrest it provoked in 1811. Continuing food shortages and another Irish famine in 1822 led up to the rapid increase in Irish harvesters coming to Britain, partly stimulated by changing agricultural methods (from labour intensive tillage to pasture) and land tenure arrangements that made the ongoing process of land sub-division un-profitable for landlords, in turn leading to consolidation of holdings and concomitant evictions. Political changes such as the Catholic Emancipation Act, Eviction and Ejectment Acts - as well as the instigation of the Poor Law for Ireland in 1838 - helped create a landless sub-class looking for day labour that was to rise to overwhelming proportions at the time of the Great Famine.<sup>61</sup>

Harvesters migrated to Britain mainly from the poor south and West of Ireland, and especially Connaught.<sup>62</sup> The sub-division of land and its subsequent collapse as a sustainable living was particularly prevalent in the district of Connaught.<sup>63</sup> O'Grada argues that the whole of the West of Ireland economy was subsidised by the seasonal migration and the poverty of the area pushed seasonal workers into Britain in order to find the monies for their rents.<sup>64</sup> They would come over during the spring months via the three main routes already mentioned from Ireland to Britain - Munster to Bristol, Connaught to Liverpool and Ulster to Scotland - spreading out by foot from the ports to where the demand for seasonal labour existed.<sup>65</sup> The lifting of political restrictions engendered by the Act of Union in 1800 removed one barrier to emigration that to some extent still exists.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently, the migratory workforce increased as the nineteenth century developed. The consequence of the lifting of political barriers as well as the rise in demand for rural labour due to increased crop specialisation, agricultural mechanisation and the relative immobility of the indigenous rural work force, encouraged the growth of transitory harvesters as well



as more permanent settlers. The attractions of the expanding labour market in the cities also siphoned off the more mobile and the indigenous rural labourers.<sup>67</sup>

Even though migration flows declined in the south of Britain after the 1850s, evidence of harvesters in the areas of Warwickshire and Gloucestershire shows that a significant part of the crop was taken in by the Irish up until the 1880s, peaking in the 1870s.<sup>68</sup> This annual event established an avenue of labour migration that provided the Irish with opportunities for the work and wages offered in England at harvest time, thereby setting precedents for the potential emigrations that would follow by engendering knowledge of routes, destinations and concomitant opportunities that could be passed back to Ireland via networks of business, families and friends.<sup>69</sup> Evidence of these diasporic links is demonstrated by the Special Correspondent for the Morning Chronicle in 1850 who noted that during the height of the Great Famine, Birmingham experienced less Irish migration than other towns and cities where there was more demand for low-skilled workers. He states, in reference to the concomitant low expenditure on removing pauper Irish at that time, that: "This itself is a remarkable fact, and would seem to show that the immigrating Irish upon that occasion were not without a knowledge of the places upon which it was most advisable for them to fasten themselves."<sup>70</sup> James Corder, Barrister and Clerk to the Guardians of the Poor in Birmingham, mentioned the general deficiency of the resident Birmingham Irish to be employed in agricultural work in 1855, presumably being aware of the other occupations on offer in the town.<sup>71</sup> But that is not to say that the Birmingham Irish were not involved in or affected by the migration patterns engendered by widespread penetration of the rural seasonal labour market. They were certainly in and around Birmingham from at least 1828, although Edward Grove, Magistrate of Stafford and Warwickshire, noted in that year that harvesters were in no great demand in these counties

at that time due to there being “rather a superabundance of labourers in most of the county districts”.<sup>72</sup> This over supply in rural labour was concomitant with the post-war agricultural decline and other factors that Rostow outlined, and would change as the industrial economy expanded through the middle part of the century.

The living conditions that most harvesters encountered were hard and crowded, many sleeping in bivouacs under the stars or cramming into lodging houses and barns, sometimes whole families. They mainly walked to their place of employment with their belongings on their back or occasionally in a handcart.<sup>73</sup> Speaking in 1834, a time of general depression, farmer John Thomas of the Warwick Road, some four miles from Birmingham, described the working conditions of the Irish harvester, alluding to their role as reserve labour force.

“In harvest time, Irish labourers get 12 shillings a week, a quart of beer a day and are lodged at night in a barn; frequently a dinner is given to them on Sunday, and sometimes also on a Thursday. When they work by the piece they can earn 15 shillings a week...they get rather lower wages than the English ...frequently too many will come, and will work for low wages, as low as 8 shillings a week.”<sup>74</sup>

He also noted that the harvesters moved on to Staffordshire before returning for their own harvest, most of them having a little land and being extremely frugal in their habits. He comments that wages were lower than previously due to the numbers arriving and that they faced competition from workers in the Birmingham manufactories who also “go harvesting in the neighbourhood of Birmingham.”<sup>75</sup> This evidence was taken in 1834 at a time of economic prosperity between 1833 and 1836 as outlined above, the competition



from industrial workers in Birmingham at this time perhaps points to the oversupply of labour as Hunt and others have argued.

Demonstrating the role harvesting played in the selection of destinations for the foundation of the Irish community, George Redfern, Deputy Constable and Keeper of the Prison in Birmingham noted how harvesters that came to Birmingham sometimes settled and gained employment in the town as labourers for masons. The connection between sojourning and settlement in England is plain, as is the association between seasonal working and the building trade.<sup>76</sup> William Whittle, builder of Birmingham, confirms this practice with his remark that: "There are more of the everyday; they come over in spring and go back in winter; some, however, stop and do not return."<sup>77</sup> James Holmes also noted that it was mainly the single men that returned to Ireland in the winter, coming back to Birmingham in the spring.<sup>78</sup> Their numbers were fluctuating greatly according to the Rev. T. Macdonald, perhaps an indication of the sojourner element of the Irish population.<sup>79</sup> By 1855, the harvester as a seasonal figure in the town seems to have been replaced by the permanently settled Irish urban labourer, coming very young and remaining till late in life, marrying local women.<sup>80</sup>

It was sometimes usual for groups of harvesters to appoint a treasurer to hold the wages of their labour. This was useful when claiming relief or passage back to Ireland under an Act for the removal of Irish and Scottish vagrants passed in 1819, a practice already referred to.<sup>81</sup> Some also lodged at the expense of the Birmingham taxpayer. Thomas Alcock, Master of Birmingham Workhouse, noted in 1834 that, "when we lodge harvestmen in the summer, we observe, when they go out in the morning, one or two others loitering about with their sickles, who no doubt keep the money, this is on their



return.”<sup>82</sup> The Rev. T. Macdonald noted that harvest men came to the Birmingham area to “pay their rent”, a reference to the subsidy of their land tenure situation in Ireland. He also recorded the “national dislike between the English and the Irish”.<sup>83</sup> Charles Lloyed, Secretary of the Birmingham Mendacity Society recorded that the incidence of fraud among itinerant Irish increased during the harvest season, with families sending their children to beg in the town also.<sup>84</sup> Thomas Alcock commented that not many Irish came to Birmingham after the harvest. He also mentions the tendency for some harvesters to pass themselves as destitute.

“I once searched an Irishman who having come with his family casually for a night’s lodging, and found four sovereigns on him. He stated when applying for relief that he had no money. He had earned money by harvesting”<sup>85</sup>

This said, he states that harvesters were well conducted, making a distinction between them and the “regular vagrants” whom he described as insolent, abusive and ungrateful (perhaps an acknowledgement of Sheridan Gilley’s assertion of the dual nature of Irish stereotypes).<sup>86</sup> Evidence that similar practices were still pursued by the Birmingham Irish in the mid nineteenth century is given by one James Corder, Barrister and Clerk to the Guardians of the Poor in Birmingham, who (regarding Irish migrants) stated that:

“During the harvest they come over here in very large numbers, and, I believe, they earn a good bit of money; and I have heard that they even appoint a treasurer among themselves, into whose hands they entrust their money; and he goes back to Ireland, and they actually

apply to parishes and unions for relief to be sent over under the provisions of the Act.”<sup>87</sup>

Harvesters encountered hostility and warmth depending on the local perceptions, group behaviour and medium term economic considerations. During harvest time in 1837, Protestant Irish Missionary for the Birmingham Town Mission, Thomas Augustin Finigan noted a gang of seasonal harvesters in the Irish district of John Street. He commented upon their impoverished position and how this was a reason for hostility between them and the host population (displaying the connections between violence, class and ethnicity). He recorded an account of fighting:

“Between a party of Irish labourers who came here to reap the harvest and who with their hooks in hand, seemed well disposed to use them upon some thoughtless young men who insulted them and cast reflections on these poor shoeless and shillingless bogtrotters from Connaught.”<sup>88</sup>

In 1848 at nearby Warwick, intoxicated Irish harvesters were causing trouble in the town, and subsequently were attacked by English navvies in the area. Reporting of the affair used the racialised discourse of Saxon verses Celt. In 1860 there were disturbances in Stratford and Warwick along with a brawl involving 30–40 Irishmen in Longbridge near Birmingham that re-erupted a week later resulting in the injury of a police officer. Drunken brawling was in evidence right up to the 1880s.<sup>89</sup> Farmer Thomas of Birmingham noted - again alluding



to the reserve labour force perception - that “the English dislike them being employed; their master is forced to protect them from abuse.”<sup>90</sup>

After working the harvest in Britain, some, as has already been mentioned, would mitigate their travel expenses by claiming a free pass home to Ireland, declaring themselves destitute and eligible for removal to their home parish under the statutes of the Poor Law, where the local tax payers could bare the burden of their relief, a practice that was identified as common throughout Britain.<sup>91</sup> The numbers of Irish using this avenue of transport increased greatly between 1828 and 1833 along with a concomitant increase in Irish migrants of all descriptions.<sup>92</sup> All the above images feed into a notion of a fraudulent “undeserving poor” - as outlined by Himmelfarb - linked to ethnicity. The notion that the Irish were not really poor or deserving of relief is implicit in many of the answers given to government inquiries foregrounding the link between poverty, ethnicity and discrimination.

As the development of Britain's infrastructure and the growth of cities during the Industrial Revolution gathered apace, there was an increase in demand for Irish labour in the construction and transport industries. Roads, dams, pipe tracks, cuttings, canals, harbour works, shipbuilding, docks, and by the 1830s, railways, were at least partly built on the labour of Irish navvies depending on the region. It was common for contractors to advertise in Ireland when the demand for canal workers began to grow, with well over 50,000 labourers employed by 1800.<sup>93</sup> Indeed such was the demand for labour, land owners became anxious of the drain of seasonal labour away from harvesting into more permanent navigation work. For instance, in 1793 a Sir Charles Morgan moved for leave to bring in a



bill to “restrain the employment of labourers in the time of the corn harvest” to ameliorate the labour shortage.<sup>94</sup> This demonstrates the links between harvesting and navigation work, one occupation leading to opportunities in the other. This idea will be developed further in relation to building work. As canals gave way to the railways, the Irish navy was provided with more work that took him to many parts of Britain despite the availability of English labour due to the depressed economy after 1836 that led to many disturbances between the ethnic groups over wage levels - although it has been argued that this violence was sensationalised and overstated at the time.<sup>95</sup> But this in itself points to the ethnic marker of an “Irish disturbance” creating visibility through over zealous media depiction, reinforcing and feeding violent stereotypes.

The Irish were not to be found in all areas of navvying, being mostly concentrated in the dangerous low skill labouring end of the occupation.<sup>96</sup> Their employment was patchy, the Irish consisting of at most around ten per cent of the workforce.<sup>97</sup> The real figures are problematic, however, due to the restrictions of sources. The trade was characterised by a great deal of sub-contracting and a subsequent lack of records. As such, detailed accounts of the origins and nationality of navvies remain obscure.<sup>98</sup> Sullivan asserts that the Irish navy was mainly an English speaking Ulster Catholic, differing from the harvesters in their concentration in the north of England.<sup>99</sup> However, although they were found throughout Britain they were mainly confined to the north of Birmingham and west of Derby, being found here for the longest period and in the most numbers.<sup>100</sup> They typically shared their accommodation and were segregated from the other nationalities, lodging together in large numbers like many of their compatriots throughout Britain.<sup>101</sup>

Sullivan makes a distinction between navigators and labourers and it is generally presumed that the Irish were employed as the latter, being involved in shifting earth and general labouring as opposed to the more skilled work of tunnelling, mining and timbering. He also comments on the social and geographical isolation of the Irish within navvying that probably made the Irish as a group visible and vulnerable to inter-ethnic violence with the English and Scottish.<sup>102</sup> Indeed the outbreak of violence between English and Irish navvies was seemingly common (remembering that navvies were male and isolated from the normal restraints of civil society, they demonstrated a propensity towards violent behaviour, especially as the consumption of alcohol was a major part of their social lives). Sullivan asserts that up to a third of all Irish navvies were involved in this ethnic violence with the English, citing bigotry and discrimination as the reasons. Apart from these tensions violence was also to be seen between the Irish and Scottish over religion. The fear and reality of Irish labourers undercutting indigenous wage rates and strike breaking were also a powerful medium to short term reason for violence erupting between the groups, a riot on the North Midland line in 1835 being instigated due to resentments over the issue of wage rates for instance.<sup>103</sup> The peak of these antipathies came in 1846 coinciding with rapid expansion in the industry (between 1844 and 1846 the numbers employed in navigation work expanded from 9,000 to 100,000).<sup>104</sup> This period of unrest coincided with the period of poor social conditions that Rostow has noted, an underlying long to medium term condition for generating social unrest as the Chartist agitations of the time underlined.

Despite the troubles between ethnic groups in the workforce, the employers had a more benign perception of their Irish employees. Famous railway contractor Samuel Morton Peto commented on the Irish navvy, "I know from personal experience that if you pay him well, and show you care for him, he is the most faithful and hard working individual in



existence.”<sup>105</sup> Indeed employers encouraged the recruitment of navvies in Ireland, as the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom reported in the early part of the century:

“it is the custom for persons who have contracts to dig roads, ditches and canals ...not only to encourage the Irish to come to, but their have been cases where they have sent advertisements to Ireland to come on the prospect of a great supply of work”<sup>106</sup>

Although the sources for researching navvy work are problematical, as it is known that Irish navvies were in the area north of Birmingham and west of Derby in the greatest numbers and for the longest period as already mentioned, they would be aware of Birmingham as a place of work and settlement and were probably influential in Irish settlement in the area.<sup>107</sup> According to Brook, navvies were mainly agricultural labourers previously and many of the Irish were former harvesters demonstrating a continuity of employment in this area as we have already seen.<sup>108</sup>

Projects that Irish navvies could have worked upon include the original “Birmingham Canal”, started in 1766, which connected the town - via Wolverhampton to the north - to the national system, thereby linking Birmingham to the ports of Liverpool, Hull and Bristol. Others were built in the early part of the nineteenth century until Birmingham was circled by canals leading to the expansion of trade and the town itself.<sup>109</sup> The age of steam meant navvies were constructing from the 1830s, linking Birmingham to the great ports including London, the Liverpool connection being finished by 1837.<sup>110</sup> The



Grand Junction Railway ran from Birmingham to Newton le Willows where it joined the Manchester to Liverpool line; the line to London was finished in 1838. Lines continued to be built throughout the century linking Birmingham to the rest of the country and greatly increasing the prosperity of the town and city. The height of this “railway mania” came in the 1840s providing new main and branch lines, increasing the volume of traffic, trade, goods and labour into the expanding cities of the Victorian age.<sup>111</sup> Jackson notes the parallels between navvying and building work in general - mobility, isolated life styles, pre-requisites of endurance and strength - through to the late twentieth century.<sup>112</sup> The concentration of Irish labour in navigation work close to Birmingham is a probable pre-cursor to their pervasion of the low skilled end of the building trade in Birmingham. References to navvies in Birmingham are few but Irish navvies were heavily involved in the building of the Manchester to Birmingham Railway and were found in groups near Birmingham at Bridgenorth and Brosley.<sup>113</sup> In 1850 the Special Correspondent for the Morning Chronicle noted that “the few Irish who reside in the town are chiefly ‘navvies’, bricklayers, labourers and dealers in cat and rabbit skins”<sup>114</sup> The Protestant proselytiser John Palfrey noted in 1867 a meeting with navvies in the fields outside Birmingham, displaying his piety to the full:

“In the evening I took another supply of tracts and went out on the hilly fields, there I had an opportunity of speaking of a Saviour's love to several navvies, who had congregated together, and also to distribute the silent messenger; while speaking, a youth about fourteen years of age, very healthy looking, came forward, and with his hand stretched out, said, he did not believe there was a God, for

he could neither see nor feel Him, “and if there is,” he said, “let Him strike me dead.” This was on the Sunday evening between eight and nine o’clock, and on Tuesday morning when his mother called him to get up, he made no answer; shortly afterwards she called again, and receiving no answer the second time, she went into his bed room and found that his spirit had gone to face that great and holy Being whose existence he had only thirty-six hours before denied. The Jury returned a verdict, “died by the visitation of God.”<sup>115</sup>

A prosaic tale, but one that probably signifies the young age of navvies, two thirds being under 30 - including the Irish - and the propensity to die young while occupied in this hard and dangerous occupation.<sup>116</sup>

With the expanding urban economic base in Birmingham came an expansion of the town itself. To cope with the rising demand for new buildings and infrastructure a novel new way of raising capital was invented and the first ever building society was founded in Birmingham in 1775. The growth of housing demand led to the expansion of the town and by the 1830s there were over 2,000 courts, the main form of domicile was the back to back house.<sup>117</sup> R. A. Slaney, in evidence before the 1845 Commission Inquiring into the State of Birmingham and Other Towns remarked in regard to the expanding population and their housing needs that:

“The increased demand for workmen in these districts called for additional dwellings which have been erected, or *run up*, as the

phrase is, in many instances with extraordinary celerity, and with *no regulations* to ensure those conveniences which are necessary for the health and comfort of the inmates...the main object in almost all cases being to pack as many dwellings as is practicable on any given quantity of land, and to build them at as little expense as possible.”<sup>118</sup>

By 1840 there was still no general building act to regulate the trade although there was a body of Town Commissioners licensed by Act of Parliament who did have powers to regulate sewage, paving, lighting and ostensibly the erection of buildings.<sup>119</sup>

After the infilling of the town boundaries by building construction that occurred in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Birmingham's environs extended out into the surrounding countryside taking in Ashted to the east, beyond the Fazeley canal to the north, building in the west became the New Hall estate with the fashionable Islington area and to the south the development of the Deritend district into the lowlands of the river Rea. The largest development was the early century construction of the Edgebaston estate. By the 1840s a housing boom was underway with expansion visible on every side of Birmingham and by 1850 this burst of growth had been pushed outwards by the relentless rise of industry and population, a situation that proceeded throughout the century.<sup>120</sup>

The building industry is a traditional area of Irish employment that is probably connected to the Irish involvement in navigation work, concentrated north of



Birmingham, itself an extension of the harvesting tradition as has been mentioned already. Jackson records that the building trade was characterised by job insecurity and the need to walk long distances to work.<sup>121</sup> In this situation a highly mobile and flexible work force would be required. The Irish being well represented in harvesting and navvying were used to these conditions and seemed to have fitted these requirements in Birmingham and elsewhere. In Manchester at the beginning of the nineteenth century bricklayers labourers were chiefly English for instance, but by the 1830s almost entirely Irish and London had many builders labourers also.<sup>122</sup>

In 1828 Dr. Darwall in his *Observations on Birmingham* pointed out that of the Irish in the town that. "Few of them are employed in the manufactories, but they become Mason's labourers, or follow what other casual occupation they can obtain."<sup>123</sup> He goes on:

"...it is a pleasure to add, that even with the Irish, considerable and manifest improvement has taken place in the last eight years. Many of them are employed than formally in manufactories; their appearance is bettered, and they are much less addicted to drunkenness, they seem in fact to have a stronger sense of the advantages of civilisation."<sup>124</sup>

In 1834 the Rev. T. Macdonald noted: "The Irish are principally employed for their manual labour, they are rarely employed in departments which require considerable mechanical skill."<sup>125</sup> The Rev. Peach states in the same report that: "The Irish never look for any trade or business; they merely seek to get their living, as their fathers have done, by labour." He mentions that many were also toiling in the manufactories in

heavy occupations such as strikers, but is disparaging about their prospects in business.

“They never make fortunes or rise in the world. I never knew an instance of a working man setting up a shop or public house. The few Irish shopkeepers in Birmingham come over with money. I have never heard of any showing any mechanical skill or talent”.<sup>126</sup>

John Walthew a builder of Birmingham noted that: “The Irish seldom get any better; they are born bricklayers labourers, and they die bricklayers labourers. I have known some Irish joiners get into business, but very few. One man got into good business but failed after a few years.”<sup>127</sup> George Redfern, was in agreement when he opined upon Irish upward mobility that:

“In plastering some have risen to become plasterers, but only plain plasterers, not ornamental hands. If the Irish get into manufactories it is not to learn the trade, but merely as drudges. Many of them rise in the world and better themselves; few rise above public house keepers. The Irish show less ingenuity and cleverness than any other class of men. Now and then there is a shrewd man.”<sup>128</sup>

Those that were toiling in the town were mainly builders labourers, appreciated by some employers and disparaged by others. Take this comment from John Walthew:

“I generally have about 50 labourers in my employ; sometimes as many as 70; they are all labourers, only three or four are in higher branches – one a stone mason, one a carpenter etc.... We don’t take Irish labourers from choice; we can not get English; the Irish require a great deal more of attention to make them do their work – a great deal more instructing;



if you tell them a thing they forget it the next minute. We prefer the English, not because they are more regular or punctual or steady, but because the Irish require to be told everything; they get in one another's way; we are obliged to be as particular again with them; we are forced to keep them in sight; they are obedient; they do as they are told; if they know how... not one Irishman in ten could wheel a barrow on a plank if you turn your back on him.”<sup>129</sup>

Despite the obvious prejudice towards his labourers he admits that they are well conducted at work and that he has employed some of the same Irish men for up to 15 years. One man “worked for me for 14 years, then went away for a year and 15 months, and came back to me, and has worked since for 4 or 5 years; he is still a common labourer...”<sup>130</sup> This meant that Irish labourers in the building trade had been operating since at least 1814 on this witness's statement. James Holmes, a plasterer of Birmingham, remarks in contrast to the above account that:

“Before I came to Birmingham I could not bear the thoughts of an Irishman; now I would sooner have an Irishman than an Englishman for a labourer; an Englishman could not do the work they do when you push them; they have a willingness to oblige that the English have not; they would die under anything before they would be beaten; they would go at hard work till they dropped, before a man should excel them. They show as much ingenuity and skill as the same class of English; they require more looking after; they talk more at work; they don't require more instructing than the English; they only require



looking after to keep them to the collar; my business requires a better kind of men than the bricklayers' labourers, and therefore we look for the best men."<sup>131</sup>

William Whittle states that for every 20 applications for work in his building firm he only received one application from an English labourer. Of those he employed he remarks on their reliability but again their lack of aspiration, at most a few becoming bricklayers, hod men being a more typical job.<sup>132</sup>

The onset of winter in the building trade led to some Irish builders returning home. James Holmes noted that the single Irish in his plastering business returned to their birthplace in the winter. He also trusted them to advance wages to those Irish employees who remained in the winter.<sup>133</sup> An illustration of the mobility of the Irish workforce in the building trade is clear in this comment from Birmingham builder and employer of Irish labour William Whittle: "Some times six Irish will apply on a Monday morning (*for work*); they are birds of passage and go about the country: if they get work, they work."<sup>134</sup> This sojourning connection to harvesting and navy work could cause problems for those Irish who were resident in Birmingham in the winter, the building trade being seasonal in nature, inclement weather affecting availability of work. In Birmingham in 1855 James Corder remarked about Irish who had applied for relief from the Poor Law in Birmingham when asked about their employment: "Chiefly out-door work, which could not be carried on during the inclemency of the weather..."<sup>135</sup> On being asked about Irish labourers in Birmingham he replied that the bad weather had shown that many were resident as workers in the building trade.<sup>136</sup> He opined that of those claiming relief after six weeks of inclement

weather, “very few of them are artisans; I believe they are generally employed as hard working labourers.” He expressed the opinion that there were as many as 20,000 Irish in Birmingham at this time; the great majority of them employed in “rough labour”. Corder also displays the opinion that the Irish as a group are fraudulent.

“ I think many of them who had been in receipt of good earnings, the heads of families, with their families, receiving two or three pounds per week up unto the time of the frost setting in and labour ceasing, became all at once destitute.”<sup>137</sup>

When asked of their material condition he replied that they were chiefly Irish labourers working for builders, bricklayers and plasterers, with not many engaged in agricultural labours. On the subject of building, he states that it is constantly going on in Birmingham, and its environs. Corder estimates that a bricklayer’s labourer will secure about 16s. for a week’s labour about 2 shillings less than the average wage for that type of work. He also states that the Irish do work that the English would not consider, that class of English labourer being employed chiefly as messengers and porters, these being comparatively few, most coarse labour being supplied by the Irish. He was not aware of those Irish that might have been employed in workshops and factories.<sup>138</sup> All these statements confirm the idea of the Irish undercutting wages and filling marginal occupations.

The Irish labourers were to be found living in Irish lodging houses in 1834: “The bricklayers labourers go to the common lodging houses, where they have mattresses, rags and blankets.”<sup>139</sup> Irish building labourers were still to be found living in Birmingham



lodging houses in 1842, foregrounding again their relation to the harvesting and navvying traditions of single mobile males. Mr. Burgess, Chief Commissioner of Police, conducted an investigation into lodging houses for the Chadwick Enquiry and returned information disclosing that of the over 200 lodging houses in Birmingham, many in the "Irish Quarters" at that time, the majority of the residents were builders labourers.<sup>140</sup>

It seems that the Irish were well represented in the building trade throughout the nineteenth century. We have seen much evidence from 1834 that the Irish were involved in the trade from at least 1814. In 1840, Mr. James Riddall Wood noted that the Irish in Birmingham were "chiefly employed by the builders."<sup>141</sup> Zeisler found in her census sample that the Irish in 1851 were spread throughout the industries and trades of Birmingham but concentrated in unskilled labouring, 35.6% of her sample.<sup>142</sup> In a letter to The Nation in 1856, A. M. Sullivan contrasted the material position of the Irish in Birmingham to those in Liverpool and Manchester, noting that the Birmingham Irish were "poor to a man and chiefly bricklayers' labourers." Father John Sherlock confirmed this position in 1861. Denvir refers to the letter in the 1890s. "This was ten years after the famine, when they were still for the most part in the ranks of unskilled labour. You find them now in every rank of life, and tolerably numerous in the various trades for which Birmingham is famous, including building work".<sup>143</sup>

Zeisler found in her census sample that the Irish in 1851 were spread throughout the industries and trades of Birmingham concentrated in unskilled labouring as already mentioned. Tailors and shoemakers were other significant trades (8.7%) along with a



significant amount of shopkeepers and traders (8.4%). Women were strongly represented in domestic service and laundry work (7%) and the manufacturing of buttons (5%). By 1881 the Irish had extended themselves into a diversity of occupations. According to Zeisler the loss of skilled employment to mechanisation meant that the (presumably) still unskilled Irish were offered a wider variety of employment opportunities. 18.4% were still general labourers, 9.2% still tailors and shoemakers and 10% shopkeepers, while 9.2% had entered the metal trades as iron forgers, strikers and brass-founders. 4% of women were still in domestic service with the majority of working women in light manufacturing of pens, umbrellas and metal finishing. The area of Saint Mary's had approximately 8% of the sample working in the gun trade for both 1851 and 1881.<sup>144</sup> This shows that the Irish were involved in many occupations throughout the town and city.

For examples of Irish born and descended subjects reaching the class of master or professional, one avenue of research is to examine local trade directories for identifiably Irish surnames of men and women in business. Although this method is less than ideal - the trade directories are not comprehensive as only those who wished to be included are there - it does offer an alternative window into class mobility within the town. The combination of surname and Christian name can also be an indicator of birth or descent, Patrick, Joseph, Francis, Mary etc. having Catholic/Irish resonances. This said though, the only concrete conclusion to be made is there is a higher than average probability that they are of direct paternal Irish descent or Irish born. For instance, James Faherty, a die sinker of 59 ½ Bull St, was recorded in the local directories as

trading in Birmingham from at least the 1830s through to the 1860s, but was Birmingham born according to the 1851 census.<sup>145</sup>

Examples of a nascent Irish business sector from the 18th century have already been presented. At the start of the nineteenth century there were a few Irish names in the local directories. In 1821 James Higgins (an old Connaught name)<sup>146</sup> who lived in the Irish area of Thomas Street was described as a Victualer. In another known "Irish area", Park Street, William Higgins manufactured iron trays, frying pans, and kitchen furniture. A Mrs Kelly of Hagley Row was recorded as in business, although not what she was trading in, and Ebenezer O'Neil of Dale End was a grocer. There were a number of Gills listed (which is another old Connaught name),<sup>147</sup> dealing in coal, steam milling, wood factoring, worsting and gun manufacture. The problem of English descent can be said of the name spelt Ryley, as the 1851 census shows there were Irish born Ryleys in Birmingham but they were out-numbered by English born.<sup>148</sup> Those that are listed in 1821 were involved in manufacturing pewter goods and pawnbroking.<sup>149</sup> By 1842 the number of discernibly Irish names had increased. Thomas Murphy of Moor Street (another noted "Irish area") was a shoemaker, James Fitzgerald of Colmore Street was a paper stainer and hanger, Henry Flattery made baskets at 22 Constitution Hill, Joseph Gill retailed beer in Hockley while Gill, Millward and Westward had a Japaner factory on Swallow Street. Joseph Higgins of Dartmouth Street was an iron plate worker and brazier. There were a couple of tailors, Simon Macann of Livery Street and William Riley of Cecil Street. Others were shopkeepers such as Charles Macbride of Cross Street, James Ryley of Palmer Street and Joseph M'Mahon, a hardware dealer of Edgbaston Street. Two Ryleys, George Thomas and Robert were pawnbrokers of Stafford Street and Warwick Street respectively. A



number were involved in retailing beer, such as John MacCarthy who was also a Slater, and Thomas Riley of Sandy Lane - Mary Ryley was landlady of the Crown and Cushion Birchfeild. By this time a number of professionals with Irish names were emerging. Michael Maguire of Barr Street had a day school, Jean I. O'Flannagan was described as a "Professor" of French in Temple Street and his business, O'Flannagan, Morgan and Co., were translators of foreign languages based in the affluent residential area of Great Charles Street.<sup>150</sup> Joseph M'Ilvean was an agent for a Glasgow publishers. Also, John Lothar Murphy was a surgeon and dentist of Cherry Street and Henry Ryley was practising as a surgeon in the Old Square.<sup>151</sup>

By 1850 it is possible to check the names appearing in the directories with the census, although the census has its limitations – not all names in the directories appear in the census, due to absence or design, and not all are recorded properly. Nevertheless, we can confirm the birthplace of a number of tradesmen, masters and professionals as being Irish. Neal O'Donnell, of 24 Newton Street was a boot maker. Jean O'Flannagan, still teaching languages, had moved to 16 Newhall Street. Irish born Henry Lewis O'Hara, a surgeon of 103 Great Charles Street, had opened up business as had Charles O'Neill and Co., metal dealers of 162 Great Charles Street. Great Charles Street was a high status area at this time. Fredrick Ryley had a hosiery business in the prestigious New Street at number 2 ½ while James Ryley had a shop in Palmer Street. John Ryley was a Chaser of 52 Mott Street. Irish born Michael Byrne was an "eating house keeper" of Dale End while Patrick Byrne was a shopkeeper in the "Irish area" of Allison Street, but is unrecorded in the census of 1851. Also trading in clothes in the "Irish area" of John Street (but unrecorded) was Francis Connelly. Another missing from the census is Patrick Coyne, a rag dealer of Lichfeild Street. Mr. Faherty was still



in the die sink business, while Irish born Simeon M'Cann was a tailor of Snow Hill and his fellow Irishman Frances M'Shee was a clothes dealer of Summer Row. John MaCarthy was not recorded in the census, but had a shop and two pubs on the same street in Aston. Also not recorded was Margaret MaCarthy of Duke Street who made straw hats. Also missing are John M'Nally rag dealer of Liverpool Street, Donald Magee boot maker of Frederick Street, John Mahoney a boot seller of Lawley Street, Martin O'Neil clothes dealer of Lichfeild Street, Frederick Ryley, who was still a hosier in the affluent New Street, Henry Ryley, surgeon of the Old Square, John Riley, boot maker of Lench Street Thomas Riley, beer retailer of the mainly Irish Allison Street, and a Mr Maguire, draper of the prestigious retail area of Bull Street.<sup>152</sup> However, James Murphy, boot maker of Heath Mill Lane, John Murphy, feather dealer of Lease Lane, William and David Murphy, boot makers of Baggott Street and Brearly Street West respectively were all Irish born.<sup>153</sup>

A couple of Irish born residents in Birmingham were involved in literary pursuits. Michael Maher was a Catholic bookseller of Congrave Street while John Frederick Feeney was recorded as the publisher of the Birmingham Journal newspaper of up market New Street. Feeney arrived in 1835 to work on the Reformer as a journalist and bought the weekly Birmingham Journal in 1842 and founded the daily Birmingham Daily Mail, which - as the Evening Mail - is still one of Birmingham's daily newspapers.<sup>154</sup>

By 1860 there were at least 74 identifiable Irish names in Kelly's directory, involved in a wide variety of trades and professions. In a couple of the poorest streets inhabited by the Irish, a number of tradesmen and businesses had appeared, perhaps as a product of

greater wealth in the city as a whole as Rostow indicates for this time, or because those Irish emigrating had more capital by the 1860s, or the length of settlement was producing social mobility through factors such as raised expectations, education and skills leading to capital accumulation in the established community. A combination of all these traits may well have begot the rise in society in these areas, rather than the usual pattern of moving out as soon as one's social and economic profile improved. In Park Street, there was marine dealer, John Murphy and painter and plumber, John Higgins, while in London Prentice Street Patrick Flanagan had a marine store, James McIntire was retailing beer, and John Burke had a shop. In John Street, James Goffey also had a shop, as did Daniel Shaw in Thomas Street.<sup>155</sup>

By the end of the century two prominent Irish families had entered the Birmingham manufacturing elite. The du Cros family were Irish Protestants of Huguenot descent who had acquired the rights to John Boyd Dunlop's pneumatic tyre which they manufactured in Dublin. The factory was moved to Coventry in 1893 where general manager Arthur du Cros created an Anglo-Irish social club where he recruited several international Irish rugby players to work in the factory and play rugby. It was on the rugby pitch in this year that he met Moseley players Frank and Fred Byrne whose family had been in the rubber business in Birmingham since 1855. The Byrnes were a Catholic family of minor Irish nobility. Frank and Fred's father Thomas Byrne (there were four other children) was the first general manager of J. Kirby and Son, gutta percha<sup>156</sup> manufacturers and the Birmingham Rubber Company, both of the fashionable New Street in Birmingham circa 1871, with works at Charles Henry Street and later at the City Rubber Mills, Lichfield Road, Aston. The firm split on the father's death in 1889 into the Leyland and Birmingham Rubber Company, headed by the two eldest



brothers William and Robert Byrne, and Thomas, Edward and James Byrne formed the Byrne Brothers India Rubber Company at the Aston works. It was these younger brothers, exploiting their sporting contacts who joined with the du Cros family to form the The Rubber Tyre Manufacturing Company in 1896 with Edward Byrne as Managing Director. This company eventually became Dunlop Rubber Company in 1901 with Joseph Byrne retained as Advisory Rubber Expert. Thus two Irish families, one in Birmingham, one in Coventry, were seminal in the creation of a company that is still a household name.<sup>157</sup>

Apart from tradesmen and professionals there were a number of Irish born and descended priests and nuns working in Birmingham and its environs. Thomas Finnigan, who lived at 42 Mount Street in 1842, was a Protestant missionary at Carre's Lane Mission.<sup>158</sup> The Rev. Thomas McDonnell was ministering at Saint Peter's Roman Catholic Church on Easy Hill from the 1820s; the Rev. John Sherlock set up the Roman Catholic Church in Moor Street in the 1860s. Sister Mary Catherine M'Auley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, brought eight nuns from Dublin to found a mission in Hunter's Road Handsworth in 1841, to minister to the poor. There were many others and the influence of Irish Roman Catholics in Birmingham continues to the present day.<sup>159</sup>

The role of Irish women in the labour force is an under researched area. The most common industries for Irish females in nineteenth century Britain were textile factories, laundry work and domestic service, as well as piece-work contributions to the family income by a number of casual trades such as rag picking, sewing or other needle work.<sup>160</sup> The post Great Famine period was a watershed in the migration of Irish



women to Britain; from this period male harvesters began to bring their wives and family along with them where they would also work on the land. Those that settled could be found in all the above trades as well as some more skilled occupations such as governesses.<sup>161</sup> In Liverpool Irish women were heavily concentrated in low paid casual service, retail and domestic work, the most common form of employment being dressmaking, followed by retailing and domestic service.<sup>162</sup> Domestic work was also the largest employer of Irish women's labour (as it was of all females) in London in 1851, the principle skilled employment being low paid needlework and other rag trade tasks; some also worked in the paper industry.<sup>163</sup> Domestic service was an area where Irish females could face strong competition from local women - as supply was often larger than demand. However, in Birmingham this does not seem to be the case in the middle of the century as local girls appeared not to be interested in the occupation, preferring lighter shop work instead.<sup>164</sup> Zeisler has shown that Irish women in Birmingham were involved in domestic service and the button trade throughout the century. William Whittle notes that English labourers also preferred employment in less arduous occupations such as shop work.<sup>165</sup>

In 1834 surgeon John Mouchet Baynham asserted that one reason for Irish poverty in Birmingham was that women and children did nothing towards the family economy,<sup>166</sup> suggesting that Irish female employment was rare. Zeisler's evidence seems to preclude this as an argument and John Denvir recorded at the end of the century that Irish women in Birmingham "still find employment in the manufacture of the multifarious articles fashioned from brass, Iron and other materials, for which Birmingham is world famed."<sup>167</sup> The wages paid to women were different, a man being paid up to twice or three times more than a woman in 1842 and the same was true for males and females in

the brass trade in 1847. Men would be paid up to 30s per week for manufacturing work, women 10s for polishing and finishing.<sup>168</sup> Denvir also quoted the aforementioned Father Sherlock, Irish Roman Catholic Priest of Saint Michael's Moor Street. Quoted in Denvir and probably sourced from the mid to late nineteenth century, he commented on the work of Irish women, noting that: "The elder members of the family work at buildings, while the younger and the females are employed in factories".<sup>169</sup> Thomas Finigan noted that the daughters of an impoverished Irishman both worked at pin-heading in 1837.<sup>170</sup> This was still an occupation for children in 1842 and for infant paupers in 1850.<sup>171</sup>

The labour that Women and children provided was as important to the industrial expansion of Birmingham as that provided by men that had migrated from Britain, Ireland and abroad. Conditions for women in factories were different from that experienced in the textile districts of the north with the barrack like buildings "manned" by alienated extensions of the mechanised mass production unit. The diversity of trades and their medium to high skill nature meant working conditions contrasted. J. S. Wright noted in 1857 that business was conducted from 8.00am to 7.00pm or 9.00am to 8.00pm, not as early as textile factories. Breaks were held, 1 to 1 ¼ hours for dinner and ¼ to ½ hour tea breaks. A half-day holiday on Saturday was normal as well as the Sabbath break. Work can start as early as seven years of age for which they were paid 1s to 2s per week, by 12 to 14 reaching 3s to 5s, wages paid on a Friday or Saturday morning. Women labourers were concentrated in the button, steel pen, gold chain, jewellery, tin and japan, screw, brass foundry, and papier-mâché industries. This said, the economic configuration of the master in a small workshop included the employment of his wife and family as well as journeymen and apprentices, therefore women were



involved in a wide variety of trades and manufactory processes in the home/workshop. Female wages in the button trade were typically between 12s and 18s in the mid 1850s, screwmakers earned between 8s and 10s. Driven by poverty, the mother of a 1-month-old child would normally return to work. Those who minded children could receive 6d per child per day. Most workers were illiterate.<sup>172</sup>

Working conditions for the male labouring Irish in Birmingham were as hard as any in the Victorian city, but many of them faced the added problems of severe poverty and the seasonal nature of the building trade, inclement weather ending employment, sometimes for a month or more leading to strains placed upon the Poor Law system in Birmingham.<sup>173</sup> The general perception of them was that, as the Rev. Peach put it, “I think the Irish labourer can bear more fatigue than the English, and require less food when they work hard.”<sup>174</sup>

The nature of health in Birmingham industry was seen by one government report as being favourable compared to other large towns of the period.<sup>175</sup> But in the same year, the Chadwick report noted that Birmingham was as dangerous a place to work as any other un-regulated nineteenth century town. Injury from the catching of clothes and long hair in machinery was noted as common, and the numbers of scalds and burns were remarked upon as being particularly prevalent, perhaps unsurprisingly in a metal work dominated town. The trade of manufacturing percussion caps was also singled out for a special mention as injurious to health and the Irish were involved in this trade.<sup>176</sup> This said, the numerous diverse natures of trades and sub-division of



occupations in the town made any authoritative evaluation of the nature of working conditions in general difficult.<sup>177</sup>

The work done, the Irish waited to be paid. The Rev. Peach in 1834, noted that Irish building labourers were paid in pubs. "They do not stint themselves for the purpose of drinking, but as the building pay table is at a public house, they get something to drink and then go on." He also notes the perception of the Irish as being able to bear more fatigue in the workplace and survive on smaller rations than their English compatriots are.<sup>178</sup> Those who worked in manufactories were not usually paid in pubs but were paid late on Saturday evenings, owners arguing that payment of Friday would lead to Saturday being considered a day of play, depriving them of workers. This delayed payment led to problems of domestic economy in relation to late drinking by workmen, who in the rush to buy provisions on Saturday night, often in the dark, found problems in selecting quality goods.<sup>179</sup>

As far as wage rates were concerned and the argument of undercutting rates of pay, in 1834, George Redfern asserted that Irish labourers were in receipt of the same wages as the English labourers: "there is no disinclination to employ them at equal wages" as he put it. As he was the prison keeper and Deputy Constable, his detailed knowledge of wage rates is questionable, but those mainly English foundation men working in the building trade earned between 14-15s a week according to one builder John Walthew, who then states that one of his longest serving and trusted Irish labourers earns 13s a week "the same for English and Irish; sometimes they get an extra allowance of a shilling a week in busy times".<sup>180</sup> Foundation work was probably more skilled than

general hod carrying and the like, but it must have involved a lot of digging. The assertion that the English and Irish got the same wage for similar work is less than equivocally sustained by builder William Whittle: "The wages of Irish and English are about the same, if anything the English get a little more, but the difference is not worth naming."<sup>181</sup> In the plastering trade Irish labourers were said to get 12 to 13s for six days work, working an extra 2 hours a day in the summer for extra pay. They were considered to be very honest, industrious and reliable, willing to work any time by plasterer James Holmes.<sup>182</sup> In contrast, John Mouchet Baynham, Surgeon of the General Dispensary and the Town Infirmary of Birmingham, noted that, "I have a sixth part of the town under my care. There are probably at least 2,000 Irish in my district. Almost all these live in the greatest poverty and filth, infinitely worse than the same class of English; they are mostly bricklayers' labourers. These persons are not so well off as an Englishman who gets 13s a week..."<sup>183</sup> He blames the lack of work done by the women and children of the family unit as a reason for this poverty and that they do not manage their domestic economy as well as the English. The Irish were said to be doing better by the mid-century. James Corder estimated the wages of Irish labourers in 1855 and he thought many of them had been in receipt of good earnings: "the heads of families, with their families, receiving two or three pounds per week up unto the time of the frost setting in and labour ceasing."<sup>184</sup> The vagaries of seasonally sensitive work such as building must have mitigated the effectiveness of this sum.

This said, it seems that all the respondents were somewhat unreliable witnesses to the wage rates of Irish workers. In the context of a commission set up to investigate the poor Irish in Britain, and charged to formulate remedies to their poverty and drain



upon charitable institutions and government resources during the period of the introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act, the employers of Irish would not be willing to explain that the exploitation of Irish labour was instrumental in their poverty and in undermining native wage levels. The evidence of John Mouchet Baynham is an affirmation of the poverty of the building labourers condition as worse than the English, his reasoning for the discrepancy is clouded by his moral judgments on the Irish character, such as his opening remarks which contain the assertion that "The Irish in Birmingham are the very pests of society".<sup>185</sup> James Corder too shows a distrustful and discriminatory attitude to the poor Irish under his care. His assertion that the Irish earned good wages should be judged in parallel to his statements on their untrustworthiness when claiming poor relief, his agenda being to limit fraud. Thus the link between poverty and ethnicity in the eyes of official "primary definers" is made explicit and the representations of the poor Irish are constructed on the whole as negative.

In conclusion, Birmingham was a principal industrial and commercial centre for its region. The communication system of canals, and later railways, that joined the town to the industrial Black Country and the ports and major cities enriched and nourished the economy encouraged by the flourishing consumer markets at home, abroad and within the empire. The development of a financial and intellectual capital nourished this growth. The population and town swelled as a result of this economic expansion, attracting labour from the countryside and abroad.



The existence of Irish harvesters in the area not only provided knowledge and experience of travel and destinations, the similarities between this primary Irish occupation and the expansion of the economy leading to increased urban building and infrastructure projects drew the Irish into navvying and building work in general within the town and elsewhere. As the century progressed the Irish spread into many of the diverse trades that the town was noted for as well as contributing in an increasing fashion to the business life of Birmingham.

The role of the Irish as a reserve labour force in the classic Marxist fashion of undercutting wages was taken as read in the nineteenth century town, and there was some evidence of its reality. There is also evidence that male and female Irish did indeed toil in areas of the workforce that their English competitors shunned such as builders labourers and domestic service, but at times of distress this could become a burden in prejudicial terms. The effects on wage inflation and job competition were a incubator of resentment towards the Irish in the native Birmingham working classes as elsewhere. Although gathered predominantly in the low skill labour market, the Irish demonstrated class mobility to some extent by their infusion into trades and business.

It has been suggested that the Irish shunned Birmingham somewhat due to the high skill industrial base, favoring the heavy low skill work for which they have been mostly remembered within the popular national discourse. Certainly, the industrial area surrounding Birmingham would have provided many of these jobs and migration was significant here. Perhaps this explains the relatively low numbers when compared with the other great industrial cities of this period. This said, there were plenty of jobs

requiring no or little skill in the town, but the Irish preferred other districts to migrate to in their great numbers.

The notions of the Irish occupying an ethnic economic ghetto have to be challenged. Those that did, were understood (with some supporting evidence) to undercut wages and conditions. Official “primary definers” accepted and reinforced the illegitimate and fraudulent “nature” of Irish ethnicity in relation to poverty and poor relief. This created an element of hostility between the Irish and native worker that in turn could be exploited by those employed in the hegemonic process of incorporating the masses into the bourgeois nation building project. The opportunity of an ethnic threat could be utilized to divide the working class along national lines thereby cutting across class ones. To the Birmingham worker in the building trade or agricultural labour, it was not the labour supply within a free market that was determining their lack of opportunities or wage suppression but the Irish immigrant. To the middle class tax payer the poor Irish were a fraudulent burden. This foregrounded the ethno-national identity of the native worker in the economic sphere. In turn, this reinforced the negativity of the immigrant worker in the important sense of competitor rather than fellow worker. These perceptions would arguably have also reinforced Irish ethnic identity. Therefore the policing of the boundary of difference in the realm of economic engagement was constructed in ethno-national terms rather than class ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Crouzet, F., The Victorian Economy, Methuen, London, 1982, pp. 1-19.

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<sup>2</sup> Rostow, W. W., British Economy of the Nineteenth Century, Oxford University Press, London, 1948, pp.7-26.

<sup>3</sup> Hopkins, op. cit., pp.70-75.

<sup>4</sup> Gill, op. cit., pp.127-129.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp.201-207; Hopkins, op. cit., p.77.

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Skipp, op. cit., p.69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.167. Birmingham trades underwent a vigorous expansion between 1870-3, the number of factories manufacturing tubes doubled between 1868 and 1873. Production increases and recessions matched those of the whole economy. Briggs, 1952, op. cit., pp.29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 31.



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<sup>12</sup> Redford, op. cit., pp.115, 159-164; O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., pp.161-2; Jackson, op. cit., p.82; Pooley, op. cit., p.60.

<sup>13</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.422.

<sup>14</sup> Williamson, op. cit., pp.693-720; Hunt, op. cit., pp.172-5. Hunt points out the opposition to trade unions by the Catholic Church between 1833 and 1843 as a causal reason for Irish labour undercutting local labour.

<sup>15</sup> Chinn notes that an Irish family, the O'Donnells, owned most of the handcarts that traders hired in the Bull Ring market. Chinn, C., Birmingham: The Great Working City, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham, 1994, p.12.

<sup>16</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.133.

<sup>17</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.476.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.480.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.481.

<sup>20</sup> See Engles, F., The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1943, p.123; "Report From the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., pp.14, 18; The 1836 Report into the State of the Irish Poor,

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op. cit., has many examples of the benefits of Irish labour as perceived by employers and others.

<sup>21</sup> Denvir, op. cit., pp.389-462; Heinrick, op. cit., pp.35-60. For Heinrick's notes on Birmingham see p.42.

<sup>22</sup> There were certainly speakers of Irish in the vicinity of Birmingham. See footnote 443. Denvir, op. cit., pp.259-60. John Walthew of Birmingham noted in 1834 that "I know that some of my Irish labourers can read; some of them appear very ignorant." "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.479. See also "The Journal of Thomas Augustin Finigan: Missionary, Birmingham Town Mission 1837-1838", op. cit., 5, 26 July 1837.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt, op. cit., p.166.

<sup>24</sup> See Gilley, S., "English Attitudes to the Irish in England 1780-1900", in Holmes, C., Immigrants and Minorities in British Society, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1978, pp.81-103.

<sup>25</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp.475-6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.476.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, op. cit., pp.155-171. The bacchanalian leisure pursuits of the Irish labourer were singled out for opprobrium by many religious and bourgeois observers. The link between the Irish and excessive alcohol consumption was another site of discursive boundary creation between the two ethno-national groups.

<sup>31</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.477.

<sup>33</sup> O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., pp.156-7; Swift, 1992, op. cit., p.60; Jackson, op. cit., p.84; Pooley, op. cit., p.60.

<sup>34</sup> O'Tauthaigh, ibid, p.156; Jackson, ibid, pp.83-4; Lees, op. cit., pp.92-3; Finnegan, op. cit., pp.98-109; Large, D., "The Irish in Bristol in 1851", in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., passim; Lowe, op. cit., p.82.

<sup>35</sup> Lowe points to this as a factor for 75% of the Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire being labourers. Lowe, op. cit., pp.80-103.



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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.158.

<sup>37</sup> Gallagher, T., "A Tale of Two Cities: Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool Before 1914" in Swift and Gilley, 1985, op. cit., pp.106-29.

<sup>38</sup> In Liverpool the Irish were in competition with the English for unskilled work while in Glasgow unskilled work in mining was easily obtainable, but the craft unions and Orange Order restricted access to more skilled work. There was low mobility in Leeds, taking into account that those with the most skills probably left Leeds for better prospects elsewhere. More opportunities in London led to a small improvement in occupational status in London between 1851 and 1861, although this is rather too short period to draw firm conclusions. In West Cumbria the Irish were offered access to all sectors of the economy, although remaining on the whole in the lower sectors of the workforce. Gallagher, op. cit., pp.106-209; Finnegan, op. cit., pp.159-162; Lees, op. cit., pp.116-122; MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., p.92. See also, Pooley, op. cit., p.70 and Lobban, R. D., "The Irish Community in Greenock in the Nineteenth Century", Irish Geography, Vol. 6, 1971, p.276.

<sup>39</sup> Briggs, 1952, op. cit., p.29; Briggs, A., Victorian Cities, Penguin, London, 1963, p.186; Timmins, op. cit., p.211; Hopkins, op. cit., p.53; Skipp, op. cit., pp.64-5.

<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, B. R., Abstracts of British Historical Statistics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, pp.24-5.

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<sup>41</sup> Handbook of Birmingham, Hall and English, Birmingham, 1886, p.xv.

<sup>42</sup> “Minutes Taken Before the Select Committee on the Health of Towns 1840”, British Parliamentary Papers, Health, General Vol.2, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.136; Hopkins, op. cit., pp.55-58; Briggs, 1952, op. cit., p.1; Briggs, 1964, op. cit., pp.223-226; Briggs, 1966, op. cit., pp.186-7.

<sup>43</sup> “Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction With the Chadwick Enquiry”, op. cit., p.215; “Reports From the Select Committee on the Health of Towns”, op. cit., p.20; Hopkins, *ibid*, p.53.

<sup>44</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.146.

<sup>45</sup> Zeisler, op. cit., pp.36-41.

<sup>46</sup> Underwood, T., The “Murphy” Riots, and Demolition of Park Street, Birmingham, June 16th and 17th, 1867, T. Underwood and Co., Birmingham, 1867, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> Birmingham Daily Mail, 1 July 1874.

<sup>48</sup> B.A.A., BRCFS/2, Index to Birmingham Catholic Sick Club Register of Members, 1795-1893.

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<sup>49</sup> Hopkins, op. cit., pp.40-78. Timmins's book has articles on all these trades and others.

<sup>50</sup> Timmins, op. cit., p.207.

<sup>51</sup> Skipp, op. cit., pp.61-2. Birmingham's first joint-stock bank that still exists to day as Lloyd's Bank. Briggs, 1952, op. cit., pp.28-9.

<sup>52</sup> See Jackson op. cit., pp.73-77; Redford, op. cit., p.114; Finnegan, op. cit., p.28. Davis, op. cit., pp.95-103.

<sup>53</sup> "1861-1871" Census of England and Wales", op. cit., pp.155, 162.

<sup>54</sup> Duggan, op. cit., p.157.

<sup>55</sup> Heinrick, op. cit., pp.35-7.

<sup>56</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.412.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.387.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



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<sup>59</sup> Swift, 1992, op. cit., p.58; Finigan, op. cit., p.28; O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., p.153; O'Grada, C., "Seasonal Migration and Post-Famine Adjustment in the West of Ireland", Studia Hibernia, Vol.13, 1973, pp.48-76.

<sup>60</sup> Redford, op. cit., pp.114-16.

<sup>61</sup> Handley, 1947, op. cit., pp.1-15;

<sup>62</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.146; Jackson, op. cit., p.74.

<sup>63</sup> Redford, *ibid*, p.126.

<sup>64</sup> O'Grada, 1973, op. cit., pp.48-76.

<sup>65</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.124

<sup>66</sup> Apart from some restrictions in the 1930s and the internal exclusions that have been placed on certain individuals in Northern Ireland as part of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, migration from Ireland to the UK has never been restricted in the same way as migration from other sovereign nations. This demonstrates the continuing importance of Irish labour to the British economy.

<sup>67</sup> Holmes, 1988, op. cit., p.20. During the summer of 1841, 57,651 deck passengers were counted coming

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via Liverpool and Holyhead, the majority of them migrant workers. Redford, op. cit., p.146; Jackson, op. cit., p.75.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, op. cit., pp.76-83.

<sup>69</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.73. Paul O'Leary also notes the importance of harvesting in engendering knowledge of areas of industrial development and potential employment in nineteenth century Wales. O'Leary, P., "A Regional Perspective: The Famine Irish in Wales", Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., p.17.

<sup>70</sup> Morning Chronicle, 7 October 1850.

<sup>71</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.15.

<sup>72</sup> "Report From the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants", op. cit., p.40.

<sup>73</sup> Morgan, op. cit., pp.80-1; Davis, op. cit., p.98.

<sup>74</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.481.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.478

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.479.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid p.475.

<sup>80</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., pp.15-17.

<sup>81</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.74; Redford, op. cit., p.120.

<sup>82</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.477.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.475.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.478

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.477.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid; Gilley, 1978, op. cit., passim.

<sup>87</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.14.

<sup>88</sup> "The Journal of Thomas Augustin Finigan: Missionary, Birmingham Town Mission 1837-1838", op. cit., 27 August 1837.



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<sup>89</sup> Morgan, op. cit., pp.79-80.

<sup>90</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.481.

<sup>91</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Irish Vagrants", op. cit., p.3.

<sup>92</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.121.

<sup>93</sup> Burton, A., The Canal Builders, Eyre Methuen, London, 1972, pp.160-1.

<sup>94</sup> Brooke, D., The Railway Navvy, David and Charles, London, 1983, i, p.26.

<sup>95</sup> Coleman, T., The Railway Navvies, Hutchinson, London, 1965, p.25; Redford, op. cit., pp.150-1; Jackson, op. cit., p.77; Davis, op. cit., pp.111-115.

<sup>96</sup> Handley, 1947, op. cit., p.66; Redford, *ibid*, p.131.

<sup>97</sup> Sullivan and Treble cite 10% quoting the 1841 census of Ireland that comments: "It has been

suggested by one of the leading engineers in England, that the Irish labourer did not at any time exceed 5000 or one tenth of the whole". Sullivan also notes how in 1845 the Illustrated London News remarked that so few Irish were employed in navvy work as opposed to the armed forces. Sullivan, D., Navvyman, Coracle, London, 1989, p.48;

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Treble, J., "Irish Navvies in the North of England 1830-1850", Transport History, Vol.6, 1973, p.229.

<sup>98</sup> Treble, Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Sullivan, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>100</sup> Brooke, 1983 i, op. cit., p.26.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Sullivan, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, pp.49, 177; Brooke, 1983 i, op. cit., p.118.

<sup>104</sup> Brooke, Ibid, p.113.

<sup>105</sup> Coleman, op. cit., p.63.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Handley, 1947, op. cit., p.59

<sup>107</sup> Brooke, 1983 ii, op. cit., p.26.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, pp.14, 26.

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<sup>109</sup> Gill, op. cit., pp.90-1.

<sup>110</sup> Cherry, G. E., Birmingham: A Study in Geography, History and Planning, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, 1994, p.49.

<sup>111</sup> Gill, op. cit., pp.284-291.

<sup>112</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.81.

<sup>113</sup> Brooke, 1983 ii, op. cit., pp.27, 55.

<sup>114</sup> Morning Chronicle, 7 October 1850.

<sup>115</sup> Palfrey, J., Mission Work Among the Destitute; Or Scenes in the Abodes of the Poor, C. Caswell, Birmingham, 1867, p.5.

<sup>116</sup> Brooke, 1983 ii, op. cit., p.37.

<sup>117</sup> For a list of Friendly Societies in Birmingham, Aston and Edgbaston between 1830 and 1847 and some description of their social functions, see Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Enquiry Into the Sewage, Drainage and Supply of Water and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Birmingham, op. cit., p.102.



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<sup>118</sup> “Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring Into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts: Appendix 1, Report on the State of Birmingham and Other Towns”, op. cit., p.14.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>120</sup> Cherry, op. cit., pp.44-52.

<sup>121</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.85.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Darwall, op. cit., p.111.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.475.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p.476.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p.479.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p.478.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p.479.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Sometimes as much as £3 a piece. Ibid, p.480.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p.479.

<sup>135</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.3.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>139</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., pp.478-479.

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<sup>140</sup> Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population: Local Reports, 1842, op. cit., p.198.

<sup>141</sup> "Reports From Select Committees on the Health of Towns and the Effect of Internment of Bodies in Towns With Minutes of Evidence Appendices and Indices 1840-42", op. cit., p.180.

<sup>142</sup> Zeisler, op. cit., p.38.

<sup>143</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.259.

<sup>144</sup> Zeisler, op. cit., pp.36-41.

<sup>145</sup> Printed Census for Birmingham, 1841-1881, op. cit.

<sup>146</sup> MacLysaght, E., More Irish Families, O'Gorman Ltd., Dublin, 1960, p.262.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p.224.

<sup>148</sup> Printed Census for Birmingham, 1841-1881, op. cit.

<sup>149</sup> Wrightson's Birmingham Directory 1821, R. Wrightson, Birmingham 1821.



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<sup>150</sup> According to the 1842 report, those affluent Birmingham inhabitants who still resided in the town lived in a number of streets, including New Street, Newhall Street, Great Charles Street, Saint Paul's and Saint Mary's Squares, The Crescent, Paradise Street and the area around Saint Phillips's Church. Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Enquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.194.

<sup>151</sup> Pigot's Directory of Birmingham and its Environs, 1842, James Henry Beilby, Birmingham, 1842.

<sup>152</sup> The most fashionable retail areas of Birmingham in 1842 were New Street, High Street, Bull Street and the Bull Ring. Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Enquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.194.

<sup>153</sup> Slater's Directory of Warwickshire, 1850, Slater, Birmingham, 1850.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid; Chinn, 1994, op. cit., pp.82-3.

<sup>155</sup> Kelly's Post Office Directory 1860, Kelly and Co., London, 1860.

<sup>156</sup> Gutta-percha was one of the first plastic materials. It was made from a mixture of resins from Malaysian trees. It was moulded and used for daguerreotype cases, golf

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balls, toilet articles, and picture frames in the nineteenth century. It is still used today in dentistry.

<sup>157</sup> Skinner, J., "Dunlop in Birmingham: The Making of an Industrial Empire", in Tilson, B., (ed.), Made in Birmingham: Design and Industry 1889-1989, Brewin Books, Birmingham, 1989, pp.211-220.

<sup>158</sup> Pigot's Directory of Birmingham and its Environs 1842, op. cit., p.23.

<sup>159</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., pp.33-4; Greaney, W., A Guide to Street Chad's Cathedral and Church, E. M. and C. Canning, Birmingham, 1877, pp.25-8.

<sup>160</sup> O'Tauthaigh, op. cit., p.155.

<sup>161</sup> Redford, op. cit., p.136; Jackson, op. cit., p.88.

<sup>162</sup> Letford, and Pooley, "Irish Women in Liverpool", op. cit., pp.100-4.

<sup>163</sup> Lees, op. cit., pp.95-6.

<sup>164</sup> Wright, op. cit., p.542; Lees, op. cit., pp. 95-6; O'Tauthaigh, p.155. In Leeds most Irish women, some 28% of those occupied, were farm labourers in 1851 with another 17% and 6.3% occupied as servants and cleaners/laundry workers respectively By

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1861 15.3% and 7.8% respectively were employed in domestic service and 13.7% and 13% by 1871. Finnegan, op. cit., pp.101-6.

<sup>165</sup> Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England and Wales in Conjunction with the Chadwick Enquiry, 1842, op. cit., p.216; "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit, p.479.

<sup>166</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", ibid, p.480.

<sup>167</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.415.

<sup>168</sup> Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports for England, op. cit., p.210; Gaskell, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>169</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.260.

<sup>170</sup> "The Journal of Thomas Finigan", op. cit., 18 July 1837.

<sup>171</sup> Morning Chronicle, 7 October 1850.

<sup>172</sup> Wright, op. cit., pp.538-544.

<sup>173</sup> "Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855", op. cit., p.11.



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<sup>174</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.476.

<sup>175</sup> “Report from the Select Committees on the Health of Towns, 1840-2”, op. cit., p.20.

<sup>176</sup> Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population: Local Reports, 1842, op. cit., p.208; B.A.A., BRCFS/2, Birmingham Catholic Sick Club Register of Members, 1795-1893.

<sup>177</sup> Birmingham Catholic Sick Club Register of Members, 1795-1893, *ibid*, p.215.

<sup>178</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.476.

<sup>179</sup> Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population, 1842, op. cit., p.214.

<sup>180</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., pp.478-9.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p.479.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p.480.

<sup>184</sup> “Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855”, op. cit., p.11.

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<sup>185</sup> “The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham”, op. cit., p.480.

### **III: Anti-Catholicism.**

#### **Chapter 4.**

#### **The Catholic Irish in Birmingham: Community and Church, 1800-1880.**

One of the most important historiographical themes of the Irish in Britain concerns the perceptions of and reactions to the Irish migrant in Victorian Britain by their English neighbours and vice-versa. Firstly the topic deals with the reception and settlement of the oldest and largest migrant group in the modern period. Secondly this theme is concerned with an important time in British history economically, socially, politically and ideologically. This was a period often described as a time of reform and tolerance but also an epoch of imperial, industrial, urban and demographic expansion and progress - an era during which many of the most important themes of modernity were developed - industrialisation, urbanisation and their corollaries of mass migration and social dislocation. Thirdly, the subject confronts a number of fundamental arguments in connection with the development of the modern city and its inhabitants - issues of public health, housing, policing and immigration that have already been explored. Fourthly, the topic draws us towards the Victorian engagement with politics, religion, nation and empire in the shape of the closest and oldest site of colonial struggle, Ireland.

In terms of ethnic boundary creation and maintenance, religion - along with language - is a key focus of difference. There are - relatively speaking - few ethnic groups that incorporate multi-religiosity suggesting the primacy of religion for boundary creation and maintenance.



Religion also delivers an ongoing actual and symbolic saliency to group membership that transcends the contingency of lived experience. For an ethnic distinctiveness to become manifest between groups it must have one or more demonstrable specific cultural attributes that are observable and of conscious value to the group. For an ethnic group to “know” itself it needs a sense of belonging and ownership of certain cultural markers that help them define the boundary between themselves and other ethnic groups. Although ethnicity needs other markers - indeed ethnicity has to be an assembly of such authentic and figurative signs - religion is one of the most potent real and symbolic emblems of ethno-cultural belonging and a key boundary marker. Organised religion calls to a higher authority than the group itself for ontological meaning, but this “truth” is mediated by some sort of institution that claims pre-eminence in the formulation and codification of what is significant and what values, judgements and morality are important in relation to the individual’s and group’s perception of lived existence. In the case of nineteenth century Catholicism, this organisational authority was international, well organised, bureaucratised and clerical influence held great power among its adherents, not least in Ireland. Protestant religions in Britain were a minority in international terms, well established as the national Church but under pressure from without by conversions or “leakage” and from within with sectarian splits. The issue that brought Protestants together was their hostility to a resurgent British Catholicism in the midst of their greatest new challenge, the development of the new urban centres that destroyed the old secular and ecclesiastical systems. The dissenting groups within Protestantism - Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, Congregationalists, Unitarians and others - realised that the new urban areas and populations presented an opportunity for their missions on earth. They envisaged the urban spaces as “free air” where they could thrive and prosper and in contrast to the established Church embarked upon an evangelical attack.<sup>1</sup>

Cynthia Enloe has pointed out how the kind of religion that an ethnic group is involved with will determine how porous the ethnic boundary with other groups is, leading to different rates of interethnic assimilation and tolerance or hostility:

“The most tense inter-ethnic relationship occurs when two ethnic groups confess different religions, each religion is theologically and organisationally elaborate and explicit, and when those religions have generated taboos operative in routine aspects of life...The intensity is increased when each religion has a tradition of evangelicalism.”<sup>2</sup>

It is important to point out that from the late 1860s the Catholic papacy entered a more aggressively evangelical Ultramontane phase with the issuing of the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility and the Syllabus of Errors that strengthened the arguments of anti-Catholics that the pope was seeking universal dominion.<sup>3</sup>

Enloe goes on to point out the increased level of inter-ethnic hostility when sects of the same religion are convinced that their theological ontology is correct and the other is corrupted:

“Moreover, when the religious beliefs of two ethnic groups are relatively close the other differences may become especially important since they are necessary for boundary maintenance.”<sup>4</sup>



Therefore, the importance of the Catholic Church to the Irish community in Birmingham was a major determinant in the marking out of them as the spiritual as well as an ethnic “Other”. One way this cleavage was constructed and reproduced was through the education and social welfare systems that were religiously based at this time. Here the religions had a hold upon and agency within their communities that reinforced group membership as well as increasing the influence of religion within the town through the social networks constructed and maintained around the church and chapel. Although the Catholic Church in Birmingham was not of course exclusively Irish (and indeed it has been suggested the national institution was intent on turning out good Anglicised Catholics rather than good Irish Catholics)<sup>5</sup> the two groups within the Church were separated by class and on the whole worshipped separately. The attacks upon the Irish and Catholic Church from Protestant evangelicals and others throughout the century helped to define, maintain and police ethnic boundaries that provided both Catholic Irish and Protestant English with a pole of identification that was externally enforced as well as internally. By attacking an Irish migrant for being Catholic, the migrants ethnic fidelity was encouraged and fostered. The migrant was able to resist by becoming “more” Irish and Catholic as both provided a refuge and a defence against native ethno/religious prejudice.

The parish church was the symbolic linchpin of community within nineteenth century Britain, the vast majority of people, Protestant and Catholic alike, identifying with their Church. Those who did not belong to one's own institution were highly visible and judged inferior and suspect. The growth of Protestant dissent post 1830 had profoundly divisive effects within this context, making sectarian allegiance a major pole of identification along with class position, the key point being that society was structured in such a way that sectarian allegiance influenced most areas of lived experience.<sup>6</sup>



McLeod points to two crucial factors in the maintenance and reproduction of sectarianism in the working classes; the hiring practices of small businesses and the patterns of education before state systems were introduced in the 1870s. The precursors to state education were the Sunday schools set up by the different churches that re-enforced identities, stereotypes, prejudices and sectarian schisms. There is evidence that they were very popular, mixing entertainment and outings with instruction and invoking strong loyalties. The hegemonic effects of these institutions were re-enforced by work hiring practices on leaving full time education where many firms recruited among those of similar religious outlook to the owners. Some built their own churches and others had direct links with the Orange Order.<sup>7</sup> In terms of ethnic boundary creation and policing, the presence internally and externally of the Catholic was fundamental to the maintenance of the idea of a Protestant Nation in Britain. Without the internal mass emigration of Catholic Irish to Britain, the expansion of the ethno-national discourse to the masses would have been far more difficult as the rhetorical attacks were made more salient by the inherent visibility of the expanding Irish population and the concomitant expansion of Catholic activity. In turn the Irish themselves became aware of their religious difference and the fact it was under attack and threatened by the mainstream as well as a paranoid section of the Protestant community. Indeed, without a strong Catholic presence organisations such as the Orange Order lose their salience and vitality - it is no coincidence that they were and are most active where there is a large Catholic Irish minority.<sup>8</sup> The reanimation of Catholicism in nineteenth century Britain was the standard around which the Protestant militant tendency rallied; without it they would have had little to bind them together as an ethno-political grouping. Birmingham was not as large a centre of Irish settlement as was the case within the comparable northern towns and cities - as well as Scotland - that were most credited with

Orange activity. Birmingham was, however, an important centre of Catholic revival and this would have not have been so without the revitalising presence of a large new congregation from Ireland.

Although the Irish population of Birmingham was constantly changing throughout the period, those who settled permanently and began to organise themselves as a community were inevitably drawn to their mainly Catholic religious background as a pole of group and ethnic identity. The Catholic Church became in many important ways central to this community's life and responded to their increasing numbers by providing social, welfare and educational institutions for their benefit. In turn the Church received new resources, in members of congregations and their contributions to funds, revitalising the Catholic mission within the town. The Church, as Samuel has shown, was the major provider of networks of support for migrants: spiritual, social and education linkages all fell within the Church's remit. Belchem has demonstrated the extent and importance of largely secular associational strands within Liverpool's ethnic enclave, but the Catholic Church still provided most migrants - and especially women - with their social as well as religious reference.<sup>9</sup>

In 1834 the priests calculated the Irish Catholic population in Birmingham at around 6,000, although only 50% were regular church attendees.<sup>10</sup> In 1851 3,383 Roman Catholics were recorded as attending services in Birmingham out of a Protestant attending community of approximately 41,500.<sup>11</sup> According to Denvir, there were about 4,000 Catholics in the town centre in 1861 (a probable reference to one Irish dominated church, Saint Michael's Moor Street) and 25,000 in the town as a whole which sounds unlikely.<sup>12</sup> If this number is anywhere near correct, how many of these



attended Mass is another question as the religious census 10 years earlier attests. However, it does dovetail with estimates of the Irish population from non-census sources such as James Corder's estimate of 20,000 Irish in Birmingham in 1855, the Special Correspondent for The Nation's figure of 15,000 in 1856 and Hugh Heinrich's 30,000 in 1872.<sup>13</sup> Kiernan notes that one church in an Irish area in Birmingham had a congregation of 4,000 by 1865.<sup>14</sup> He also records that in 1884 the largest populations of the Diocese were in Birmingham and Staffordshire and that the increase in the numbers of Catholics in the Diocese after 1847 was due to the influx of the Irish and some conversions.<sup>15</sup> It was these conversions, partly due to the evangelical efforts of the Tractarian movement, that would worry Protestant evangelicals and impact upon Catholic/Protestant relations - and therefore the Irish community - as will be demonstrated.

As has already been mentioned, a factor which marked out the two distinctly visible Irish areas in nineteenth century Birmingham was their connection with Catholicism. The London Prentice Street area was close to Saint Peter's Catholic Church, the Park Street area next to the Catholic chapel in Well Lane and later Saint Michael's on nearby Moor Street as well as the Oratory of Saint Phillip Neri on Alcester Street. The provision of spiritual needs are obviously important for Catholic Irish immigrants in selecting their settlement area, and the Church likewise began to respond to their needs as their numbers grew by consolidating their missions in these areas.

Birmingham was one of the thirteen dioceses inaugurated by pope Pius IX in his Apostolic Letter of the 27th of September 1850 which also encompassed the counties of Oxford, Stafford, Warwick and Worcester. The diocese was important in that it



became the centre and rallying point of the Catholic revival and Anglo-Catholicism in England during the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The great name of this movement, John Henry Newman, was based in the town as was the principle Catholic educational establishment - Oscott College - that trained Catholic students disbarred from the Universities because of their faith. Also at Oscott were many of the Protestant converts from Oxford who found spiritual solace and employment there. Bishop Wiseman was president and had himself received Newman into the Church here. The college became a centre of Catholic thought in Britain. Many distinguished Catholic visitors from home and abroad were to be seen in the town on the way to and from the college and the English Catholic quarterly the Dublin Review was strengthened by the writers resident there. Newman also established the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in Alcester Street in 1847. Another important Catholic first for Birmingham was the construction of the first post Reformation Catholic Cathedral, Saint Chad's, and the establishment of the Convent of Saint Mary's in 1841 as well as the relocation of a new greatly enhanced Oratory to Edgbaston in 1852. This upwelling of new Catholic institutions with their influential religious and lay membership added to a sense of Catholic vitality within the town. Coupled with this was the important symbolic demonstration of the new Catholic revival in architectural terms. Saint Chad's, Saint Mary's and the new Oratory were all designed in the ornate gothic style by the renowned Victorian architect and Catholic convert Augustin Welby Pugin. He had previously created much of the interior and decorations for Oscott College (as well as the scholastic uniform) when in 1837 he was appointed Architect and Professor of Ecclesiastical Antiquities.<sup>17</sup> Birmingham was therefore a very important Catholic spiritual and intellectual centre with international connections and the first city in post-Reformation Britain to display the new confidence of the Catholic Church in the most solid and spectacular of

symbolic forms - gothic architecture - designed by a prize winning, internationally known English convert. Thus the Catholic establishment of Birmingham displayed a self-assurance unfamiliar and probably provocative to many Protestants in this period, with a stylised aesthetic that was the antithesis of puritan austerity in worship. This demonstrates the importance of Birmingham in the Catholic Revival in Britain and was no doubt a daily reminder to those opposed to the Catholic Church of its renewed vigour.

The nineteenth century was the pivotal era of post-Reformation Catholic revival in Protestant Britain. Key to this was Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and the growing tolerance of Catholics in British political, economic and cultural life. The rural Parish squierarchy, with their passionate support of the Protestant Crown, Constitution and Nation, was declining in the face of the new power of industry and the growth of the urban power bases that was signalled by the first Reform Act of 1832 and consolidated by the second of 1867. The agitations surrounding the Corn Laws and the rise of free-trade economics signalled seismic changes within Victorian politics and society. The administrations of Sir Robert Peel and Lord Melbourne between 1834 and 1846 saw Catholics enter and rise to the heights of the diplomatic establishment and take up important roles in the armed forces, although there was as yet no prominent political figure. Whig politicians supported Catholic liberties and eventually Home Rule. However, at the same time the extensions of the franchise, the fear of revolution that Chartism had earlier nourished, the complexities of the established Church's problems with doctrine and the rise of the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism in general and the fear of resurgent papal influence created a disquiet and fear within sections of the British establishment. To add to this insecurity, the revival of Catholicism in Britain



in the nineteenth century was closely bound up with the arrival of so many Irish migrants into the towns and cities of Victorian Britain, although their important influence on English Catholicism pre dated the Victorian period. The restoration of the Church hierarchy in 1850 would have been unlikely without their presence as their appearance in congregations and the pennies they provided in the collection box made the expansion of Catholic establishments possible. Also, it was the Catholic Irish that made the Church sit up and take responsibility for the urban poor.<sup>18</sup>

There were few Irish priests at the start of the century and the clergy was strained with the influx of illiterate Irish speaking migrants in need of confession.<sup>19</sup> As far as social works undertaken by the Church, the Catholic clergy's objections to the Bible being used in Protestant poor schools was a stimulus to the setting up of new schools to teach the burgeoning Irish Catholic poor in the new urban centres, but their genesis was slow and haphazard and became a major political and religious issue throughout the century.<sup>20</sup> This provided the necessary religious divide over doctrine that is pointed out by Enloe as a factor in inflaming ethno-religious hostility. The Catholic clergy did provide what Davis calls "cultural continuity with the old country" aiding assimilation into the new way of life and proffering spiritual and material support within a strange new - and often hostile - urban environment. The presence of Irish Catholic priests also presented a cultural continuity and line of communication with Ireland. The Church was also concerned that the moral development of their new flock would be taken care of showing a concern for "leakage" to other faiths.<sup>21</sup> These factors were relevant to the establishment of Catholic institutions for the Irish in Birmingham.



The Catholic Irish in Birmingham were insignificant in numbers until 1820 although Irish and Italian names began to appear in the Birmingham Franciscan Registers after 1785.<sup>22</sup> The earliest record of a official post Reformation Catholic Church in Birmingham comes from the reign of Catholic King James II, where a Father Randolph had been ministering to Catholics within the Birmingham area for some years. The Franciscan records note the consecration of the church in September 1687 at Mass House Lane (now Mass House Circus) with a convent attached. The church was dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalen and Saint Francis. The long standing existence of violent anti-Catholicism in the area was noted from this time. The church lasted only until November 1688 after which it was destroyed on the orders of Lord Delamere by “Ye Rabble of Birmingham”.<sup>23</sup> “The very foundation stones torn up and appropriated by Protestant plunderers”.<sup>24</sup> Father Randolph retired to Edgbaston where he opened a chapel and school in 1725, one of the few where Catholics could be educated at this time and demonstrating an historical legacy of Catholic education in the Birmingham area that was to become nationally important by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The Franciscan Fathers continued to minister to the faithful of the region, braving two centuries of persecution to keep the Catholic creed alive in Birmingham.

According to J. Bossey, the Irish contribution to Catholic numbers in nineteenth century Britain came in three increasing waves, the first significant influx being around 1790, then 1820 and the post Great Famine influx of the 1840s.<sup>26</sup> There were 220 Roman Catholics in the Birmingham area in 1767, 158 of them in the Birmingham parish of Saint Martin's, with a larger congregation around the Franciscan Mass House in Edgbaston. The Catholics of Birmingham were all predominantly skilled workers with only three labourers recorded among there number at this time.<sup>27</sup> Many lived

around Saint Martin's Church but there were five families already living on Park Street,<sup>28</sup> the greatest concentration of Catholics in Birmingham and a possible magnet to other Irish Catholics who migrated to Birmingham from Ireland (as well as Italian Catholics who became resident within the area) a possible precursor to the foundation of the Catholic "Irish Quarter" as has already been discussed.

Although Catholics were being persecuted in Birmingham as elsewhere in late eighteenth century Britain, sympathetic Protestants were present within the area as well, a number helping another Franciscan, Father Nutt, to build the Church of Saint Peter's in Broad Street in 1786 with a school attached in 1799 as well as a burial ground. This small chapel was an unpretentious building somewhat disguised in order not to draw attention to itself in a time of state backed religious persecution. The Catholic Friendly Society - an important welfare institution that many migrant Irish later became members of - was also established around this time in 1795.<sup>29</sup> Birmingham had more religious Sick Clubs during the nineteenth century than most other comparable towns in Britain pointing to the importance of religion in the provision of welfare and civil life in the town.<sup>30</sup>

Following a relaxation of the Penal Laws at the turn of the century, a warehouse in Water Street was used for mass as numbers of worshipers increased.<sup>31</sup> Saint Chad's Chapel was built in 1807 Shadwell Street with a Sunday school attached under Father Edward Peach, with Irish residents in the congregation.<sup>32</sup> A day school was opened in 1823 with 70 pupils and was one of the first poor schools in Birmingham. An orphanage and lending library were also established.<sup>33</sup> The burgeoning Irish population in the vicinity of Saint Peter's led to the establishment of another orphanage in 1832 by



the Rev. T. M. MacDonald at Saint Peter's and by 1833 there were two priests in Birmingham one being the aforementioned Father Peach.<sup>34</sup> Due to the psychological hangover from the years of suppression, as well as a legal requirement within the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act that forbade the wearing of cassocks in public, the Catholic priests still wore layman's clothes and the liturgy was confined. There were no statues, font or confessional and "the mark of persecution was still there in the spirit of priest and people".<sup>35</sup> By 1838 Saint Peter's had both day and Sunday schools operating with 264 regular attendees of both sexes.<sup>36</sup> Saint Peter's established another orphanage in 1837, described as specifically for the "Children of Saint Patrick" showing that the Catholic Irish were present in sufficient numbers at that time to warrant pastoral consideration for their childrens' education from the Church - previous to the Great Famine migration. The orphanage failed two years later, however, due to a lack of subscriptions for its maintenance, perhaps an indication of the lack of Catholic resources in Birmingham at this time. The work of the Saint Peter's orphanage was eventually resurrected within a house in Nineveh (near Birmingham) especially for the education of poor Catholic children in 1847 before being moved on to convent land in Brougham Street Birmingham in 1849.<sup>37</sup> The school was run by the Sisters of Mercy from Saint Mary's Convent (which is still extant in Handsworth) and was aided by government grant after 1849.<sup>38</sup> Eventually the orphanage was transferred to the Saint Mary's proper where it was supported through donations and subscriptions.<sup>39</sup> This expansion of schools in and around Birmingham was due to the increase in demand by an accelerating Catholic population in the town during the peak period of Great Famine Irish migration. The Birmingham Catholic Magazine noted that a mission had been started in the Irish part of the town at the beginning of this pivotal time:



“In the course of the autumn of 1847, a range of buildings was procured in Park Street, one of the thickest populated Irish districts, and accommodation prepared for about 200 children. A large room also was fitted up as a chapel in which Mass was offered every Sunday, and Thursday mornings; and a numerous congregation of the poor Irish enabled to attend the Sacraments and services of the church, by which means many stragglers were brought back to the fold; many slothful servants inspired with new energy in God's service and the proper sanctification of Sunday. Two Sunday Schools were opened at the same time, consisting of about 100 each, boys and girls; the nuns from the Convent superintending the latter, and the priest of the district personally instructing the former.”<sup>40</sup>

The evangelical tone of this piece is noticeable. The writer records that the provision of Catholic institutions for the poor Irish resulted in a return to the Church of lapsed Catholics and a reinvigoration of lay members.

An historic date for Catholics in Birmingham was the opening of the of Saint Chad's Church in Bath Street in 1841, taking over from Saint Chad's Chapel in Shadwell Street. The new church became a Cathedral in 1850 at the Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy. By 1848 there were two churches and four priests, two at Saint Peter's and the chapel of Saint Nicholas's within the Irish area of Park Street served from Saint Chad's.<sup>41</sup> It was at this time that the ongoing Catholic revival in Britain was turning Birmingham into an important Catholic centre. A college of Saint Mary's at Oscott had

been inaugurated as early as 1835 specifically for students who were debarred from attending the older Universities and awarded degrees under the auspices of the newly formed University of London.<sup>42</sup> Leading light of the Oxford movement John Henry Newman, not long after his conversion to Catholicism, established the first Oratory of Saint Phillip Neri in 1847 at Saint Ann's Chapel with a school established in 1849. The chapel was situated in an old Gin factory.<sup>43</sup> The Oratory was established in the poorest quarter of Birmingham - as already noted the Irish section of Alcester Street/Park Street - attracting large congregations of 200 or more.<sup>44</sup> The services at the Oratory were sometimes interrupted by "hooligans", Newman commenting that anti-Catholicism was "strong beyond measure, especially in bad people".<sup>45</sup> The Oratory was moved in 1852 to Hagley Road Edgbaston where the Church of the Immaculate Conception was founded and a school for educating the Catholic gentry was established, Saint Ann's becoming a secular mission.<sup>46</sup> According to Kiernan, Newman also taught in the boys school and the first people to "hear the flower of Oxford" were Irish labourers that came to Birmingham in the late 1840s.<sup>47</sup> By 1855 there were seven places of Catholic worship in Birmingham as the Catholic population - especially from Ireland - expanded.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, by 1846 a mission had been established for the Irish in Moor Street that became Saint Michael's Church in 1861 - the congregation was as large as 4,000 by 1865 as already mentioned<sup>49</sup> - and a Saint Patrick's was founded in Dudley Road in 1862.<sup>50</sup> The Rev. John Sherlock was resident at Saint Michael's from 1865. Previously the Catholics of the area had used premises in Well Lane off Park and Allison Streets. The lower part of the building had been used as a boys school, the first floor as a girls school and the second floor as a chapel. By 1867 Saint John's school for boys was set up on London Prentice Street attached to the mission at Saint Michael's.<sup>51</sup> It was also at this time that that Bishop Ullathorne, while in Rome,



received the sum of £2,700 in order to set up a seminary in Birmingham, pointing to the importance of Birmingham as a Catholic educational centre.<sup>52</sup> A Saint Joseph's, formally a chapel served from Saint Chad's, was established in the Nechells area of central Birmingham in 1872 with two priests and two other Roman Catholic schools were founded in Bartholomew Street and Brougham Street in October and December of the same year. Saint Catherine's of Sienna was consecrated in the Horsefair on 28 September 1876 and another school was inaugurated in Shadwell Street in June 1883 at a cost of £4,500.<sup>53</sup>

These churches, schools and charitable institutions were supported by prominent members of the Irish Catholic community. This was important as it demonstrates the growing influence of Irish Catholics upon the Birmingham Catholic community. The opportunity for Irish migrants to engage in a social welfare society, send their children to school and receive relief at times of distress was an important social function of the Church that cemented its relationship spiritually with the migrant Irish. The presence of educated Irish priests within the Church must have reinforced this attachment.

As early as 1815, the Catholic schools in Birmingham were being sustained by a Mr. Faherty to the tune of £100 per annum - a considerable sum - as well as by a Mr. Maguire of Dublin to the tune of 10s 6d.<sup>54</sup> By 1834 the Catholic day and Sunday schools were beginning to attract subscribers and supporters from the settled Irish community. The children attending the day schools paid 2d per week, Sunday school was free,<sup>55</sup> but richer subscribers donated to the education of Catholic Birmingham. Recognisable Irish names were recorded providing donations of 5s from a Mr.



McCarthy, Mr. Fitzgerald and a Mr. Riley.<sup>56</sup> In 1838, eight persons with Irish names gave money to support the School at Saint Peter's. Chief amongst these were the two Irish priests, The Rev. Thomas McDonnell who gave £5.00 and the Right Rev. Frank Walsh who donated £2.10s. At this time the school was giving instruction to an average of 136 Catholic children per day in the week and 128 on a Sunday.<sup>57</sup>

By 1843, the subscribers to the Catholic Charity Schools in Birmingham included a growing number of Irish named supporters and more schools were being established to cope with the burgeoning Catholic community. There were by now two schools in Shadwell Street, two in Saint Peter's Place and two in Oxford Street. One school chiefly funded by the school master was operating in Lease Lane. The average daily attendance of Saint Chad's schools at this time consisted of 130 boys and 100 girls with 150 boys and 180 girls on a Sunday. 50 boys and 60 girls attended the daily school at Saint Peter's with 30 boys and 50 girls in attendance on a Sunday. 110 boys and 140 girls were present on week days at Saint Nicholas's school Oxford Street, dropping to 50 boys and "very few" girls on a Sunday. There were 85 named subscribers to the Charity schools that year including 13 recognisably Irish names.<sup>58</sup>

In August 1849, the Reverends Ivers and Sullivan proposed purchasing a property for a school in London Prentice Street for £500. The School Committee commented that the area was "itself especially eligible as a locality for a school". The property was located in Court Number 3 and consisted of seven back houses and three front ones (numbers 35-7), a shop and out buildings. The three front houses and upper shop were converted into the school and School Masters House while the rest were rented out. In

September 1849 Mr. John Hardman<sup>59</sup> advanced the sum of £500 for the deeds plus £100 for the conversion of the property (at 5% interest costing the school £30 per annum). Annual repairs, water and insurance costs were £6 and a yearly rent of £22 was to be raised by those parts of the property not to be used for the instruction of children, leaving a cost to the board of £14 per annum for the upkeep of the property.<sup>60</sup>

Prior to 1862 the Catholics of the area had used premises in Well Lane off Park and Allison Streets. The lower part of the building had been used as a boys school, the first floor as a girls school and the second floor as a chapel. The aforementioned Saint Michael's Church and School was to become an important Irish and Italian church run from Saint Chad's. In 1863 a number of Irish boys names were included in the Log Book of Saint Chad's Boys School. Although there is no surviving register of names, those pupils who were struck off for contravening school rules were recorded and these included some recognisably Irish named. The school also, unusually, had a half day holiday on Saint Patrick's day, indicating a strong Irish presence.<sup>61</sup> By 1867 another educational institution, Saint John's School for Boys, was established on London Prentice Street attached to the mission at Saint Michael's.<sup>62</sup> In the same year, while addressing the 13th Annual Reunion of the Catholics of Birmingham and Districts in Aid of Poor Schools, Dr. Henry Edward Manning, Archbishop of Westminster, described Birmingham, along with Liverpool and Manchester, as being at the forefront of educating the Catholic poor.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the crowning achievement of Catholic education in Birmingham was the election of Cannon O'Sullivan, Vicar-General of Saint Chad's, to the very first Birmingham School Board in 1871 where he polled the most votes.<sup>64</sup>



The other great Catholic institution that provided services for the Irish - and especially the women of the Birmingham community - was the aforementioned Sisters of Mercy convent of Saint Mary's. During 1841 the recently appointed Coadjutor to Bishop Thomas Walsh (then Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District) and one Dr. Nicholas Patrick Stephen Wiseman - the noted supporter of the Oxford Movement - who had been active as president of the Oratory in Oscott, expressed a desire for the foundation of a religious community in Birmingham, selecting the Order of Catherine McAuley's Sisters of Mercy as the most suitable. Funds were raised from local benefactors; generous Catholic businessman John Hardman Senior paid for the Pugin designed convent along with furnishings and the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury gave £2,000 towards the project. The first temporary Superior was Mother M. Cecelia Marmion from Dublin.<sup>65</sup> On 20 August 1841 a party consisting of seven sisters including McAuley herself, accompanied by a Father O'Hanlon, Dean Gaffney, and Dr. Brown Bishop of Kilmore, set off from Dublin for Birmingham. The party was received by Dr. Wiseman the next day and the convent of Saint Mary's was founded. Sister McAuley stayed until the 22nd of September when she was forced home due to ill health and passed away shortly after.<sup>66</sup>

One aspect of the Sisters creed was the commitment to work amongst the poor. This was demonstrated by their great labours in education and the visiting of the sick and they were regular visitors to the Infirmary and Workhouse in Birmingham.<sup>67</sup> Sister McAuley had expressed the wish that a House of Mercy should be opened at Saint Mary's in order to minister to the poor and infirm. Mr. Hardman Senior had wanted to house a number of poor orphans at the convent at foundation and this was the case before they were moved into the newly built House of Mercy.<sup>68</sup> A donation was



received from the father of one of the nuns - James Caddon - of £1,000 for the building which was erected next to the convent in 1842 at a total cost of £3,310.<sup>69</sup> The House of Mercy was officially opened on Saint George's Day 1844, although it had been in operation since its initiation.<sup>70</sup> The House of Mercy was established for, "The reception of destitute women of good character, who on account of their religious inexperience or poverty, are unable to procure for themselves a place of service".<sup>71</sup> Other duties were performed by the Sisters connected to the House of Mercy, establishing a school and Almshouse in 1850. In 1845 the Sisters opened Saint Chad's Girls School in a house adjoining the church where adult instruction was carried out. There was also a well attended middle class day school and nursery.<sup>72</sup>

By 1846 the Sisters were teaching in Sunday Schools established in the courts around Saint Chad's, a branch being opened in Bath Street as well as a boys school in Will Street.<sup>73</sup> Government funding for these "Poor Schools" was accepted in 1849 but the Sisters were still soliciting donations from the public in 1871 in order to expand the schools. The governmental support for the schools was under threat due to their lack of space, the 1870 Education Act insisting on minimum criteria.<sup>74</sup> This appeal solicited funds from Mrs Julianna Hardman and one Mr. Blount of Paris.<sup>75</sup>

The commitment to teaching the poor is shown by the Sisters decision in late 1849 to send Mother Alasius Jackson to Ireland to research school matters, which she duly did, returning to Birmingham along with a qualified infant teacher. Also at this time, the first Catholic training school for teachers in England was inaugurated in Birmingham (later being moved to Liverpool). The first exams for Catholic mistresses in England took place soon after. In 1852, the results of the Examinations for the Teachers

Certificate of Merit taken by lay persons attached to the convent included several with Irish names. Maria Kelly and Mary McHale of Birmingham both achieved first class passes, while Mary Brady and Peter Fagan of Bilston received third class passes.<sup>76</sup>

The Poor School for girls and infants was erected along with the Almory in 1850 at a cost of £800, 1,800 children having passed through it by 1871. John Henry Newman contributed to the upkeep of this establishment personally.<sup>77</sup> The school consisted of two good sized rooms for mixed infants with a kitchen attached.<sup>78</sup> The Almory relieved thousands of destitute during economic recessions and - importantly for the Irish working in the building trade or on the land - seasonal bad weather. During the first 25 years of operation the House of Mercy fed, sheltered, clothed and instructed 3,000 “destitute women of good character” as well as assisting them in finding employment.<sup>79</sup> The average number of women at any time in the house was 55 with at least 16 under 15 years of age. The women and girls received instruction in washing, baking, ironing, dressmaking, and other branches of domestic economy as well as religion and “in the duties of their state of life”.<sup>80</sup> After training they were found domestic positions as servants and, if they gave good account of themselves, could be received back at the convent as the need for a home presented itself. Those who did not fulfil the strictures of good conduct - and were discharged due to their own behaviour - would not be defended by the Sisters. In the first five years of operation the House of Mercy trained 567 women who had been “saved from great danger, and many of them from almost certain ruin.”<sup>81</sup> A register to the House of Mercy (which was by the late 1880s was named Saint Joseph’s Home) survives and includes a number girls with Irish names that were attending in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup>



In 1851 Oscott College was offered by Bishop Ullathorne as the location for a diocesan orphanage, and this was opened on the 10th anniversary of Sister McAuley's death on 11 November 1851. The Convent applied for support from the government for a fee paying middle class school in 1857 but was rejected by the governmental Committee of Council on Education as "the boarding school does not qualify for support as it is not reforming in nature."<sup>83</sup> The Sisters eventually built this school for Catholic middle class paying borders the following year and Saint Joseph's boarding School - as it was known - was duly opened in January 1859.<sup>84</sup> This "Pension School" was erected at a cost of £3,310 and had trained 370 borders (including the "orphans of the middle classes") as governesses by 1871.<sup>85</sup> During the same period some 18,000 poor girls and infants were educated without charge.<sup>86</sup>

Another important charitable institution that supported the Irish community was the Birmingham Catholic Benevolent Society. This was established initially as a Sick Club on 25 May 1795 with thirty two subscribers to provide sick relief, funeral costs and some help to bereaved dependants of members. It was the oldest Catholic benevolent society of its type in Britain and lasted until the creation of the welfare state in 1948. The charity was open to all comers and at its height had 200 members. The fund was managed by a committee of nine to twelve elected trustees and was supported by contributions, donations legacies and investments. The charity's register records the name, age, address and employment of the subscribers. Although birth place is not included, from 1827 to 1893 there are 181 identifiably Catholic Irish names in the register of members employed in 102 separate occupations spanning all the major Birmingham industries with most subscribers living in central Birmingham.<sup>87</sup> In 1834 there was a charitable Catholic society established by the Irish community called the



Philanthropic. It received many applications for relief and was supported by the community. Its chief purpose was the relief of the sick and had a "live in institution for which we give women tickets; a great many are attended at their own houses."<sup>88</sup> Saint Peter's Chapel was operating a benevolent Society in 1838.<sup>89</sup> The Catholic congregations of Birmingham also donated money to non-Catholic charities such as the Birmingham Free Hospital.<sup>90</sup> In 1864 a French order of nuns, the Little Sisters of the Poor, founded a home for the aged in a large house in The Crescent Birmingham. Here three French and two English nuns housed 80 or so "broken-down" men and women before moving to an even larger home in Harborn Road that catered for around 160 elderly inmates. Entrance to the home was gained according to age and destitution rather than religious affiliation and could be interpreted as an evangelical mission as well as a merciful one.<sup>91</sup> There was also a nunnery and Home for the Incurables in Lowe Street Birmingham in 1867.<sup>92</sup>

Apart from these social functions, the Catholic Church also provided leadership in more secular political realm. By the late 1820s the Catholics of Britain began to advance a more coherent response to anti-Catholicism and some had sympathies with Irish nationalism. At the head of these two movements in Birmingham was a priest of Saint Peter's Chapel the aforementioned Rev. Thomas Michael McDonnell. Others such as Father Sherlock and Bishop Ullathorne also had Irish nationalist sympathies.

For the poor Catholic Irish in Birmingham, living close to the culturally familiar "Mother Church" must have helped in their settlement and acculturation, especially with the role education came to play within the Catholic community. Thus, the Church was invigorated at an important time nationally becoming the centre of Catholic revival

in Britain and at the forefront of educational, social and pastoral services for their new population as well as presenting an official voice of sorts for them within the town and nation. The community began to support these institutions financially as they progressed in material terms and the Church and individual priests in turn showed sympathies and commitment to Irish national causes. Thus, both groups benefited from the new era of Catholic emancipation. This in turn reinforced Irish ethnic allegiance to the Catholic Church, and the community began to demonstrate a structural and physical articulation. This in turn would impact negatively upon the Irish.

At the same time as this energetic, confident, burgeoning, evangelising and highly visible, mainly Irish, Catholic community was developing in the heart of Birmingham, anti-Catholicism and Protestant resentment in turn began to advance further. The Irish/British ethnic boundary was already marked out in terms of class, economic engagement and residence in the physical realm. Their contribution to the revitalisation of the oldest state religious enemy in the ideological realm, the Catholic Church, again marked them out as an ethno-national-religious anti-group to the Protestant “free born” Englishman. The Irish Catholic was thus marked and encouraged internally by the Catholic Church and externally by anti-Catholicism to retreat into their ethnicity and religion. The boundaries were complete and the policing and defence of these physical and ideological cleavages became increasingly important to certain anti-Catholic figures and organisations. Others associated with these groups would mine this discursive “motherlode” of anti-Catholic/Irishness to further their own political agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Mole, D. E. H., "Challenge to the Church: Birmingham 1815-1865", in Dyos and Wolff, op. cit., pp.815-18.

<sup>2</sup> Enloe, C., "Religion and Ethnicity", in Hutchinson, J., and Smith, A. D., (eds.), Ethnicity, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p.198.

<sup>3</sup> Mcfarland, E. W., Protestants First: Orangeism in Nineteenth Century Scotland, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1990, p9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.199.

<sup>5</sup> See Hickman, 1995, op. cit., passim.

<sup>6</sup> McLeod, op. cit., p.36.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp.40-9.

<sup>8</sup> MacRaild, 1999, op. cit., p.111.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel, op. cit., pp.267-299; Belchem, 1992, op. cit., pp.68-98.

<sup>10</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham ", op. cit., pp.1-7. That is not to say they did not hold an allegiance to Catholicism as a creed and did not use the Church. Attacks by Protestants would force them into a Catholic attachment even if they were not regular church attendees.



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<sup>11</sup> On Sunday 30 March 1851. This would be at a time of low Irish sojourn population that would rise in the summer months in the building and harvesting trades. “1851 Census of Great Britain, Report and Tables on Religious Worship: England and Wales”, British Parliamentary Papers, Population 10, Irish University Press, Shannon, 1970, p.ccliii; Gill, op. cit., p.374.

<sup>12</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.260. This said, Kiernan records 23,478 Catholics in Birmingham by 1884, almost one third of all Catholics in the See. Kiernan, op. cit., p.42.

<sup>13</sup> “Report from the Select Committee on Poor Removal 1855”, op. cit., p.11; The Nation, 28 June 1856; Heinrick, 1990, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>14</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., pp.35-6. Again probably Saint Michale’s.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>16</sup> A corollary of this was a particularly active anti-Catholic movement in the area. A congregation of over 200 Protestant clergy met in Coventry in 1850 to protest at “the intrusion of a Romish Bishop of Birmingham into the diocese.” Rev. J. C. Miller (sometimes spelled Millar) of Saint Martin’s Cathedral Birmingham was particularly vocal against the restored Catholic hierarchy at this time. See footnote 606. Kiernan, op. cit., p.40.

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<sup>17</sup> The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1962, p.575; Gill, op. cit., p.375.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew, D., Catholicism In England 1535-1935: Portrait of a Minority: Its Culture and Tradition, The Catholic Book Club, London, 1938, p.182. The number of Catholic Irish born in England and Wales in 1841 was recorded as 420,000. By 1851 it had become 520,000. In 1861 it was 600,000 before beginning to decline in 1871 to 570,000. Gwynn, D., "The English Catholics" in Beck G. A., The English Catholics: 1850-1950, Burns Oates, London, 1950, pp.265-70, 280; Jackson, op. cit., pp.135-138.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. There were certainly Irish speakers in the vicinity of Birmingham in the mid-nineteenth century as the afore mentioned Irish Catholic priest Father John Sherlock - who ministered Saint Michael's Moor Street, close to London Prentice Street and in one of the two major Irish areas - had studied Irish so that "he was able to hear the confessions of his countrymen who could speak no other tongue" in nearby Bilston. Denvir, op. cit., pp.259-60. Also in 1856 the Special Correspondent for The Nation commented on the courts of the Black Country surrounding Birmingham "where the Gaelic tongue is now more often heard than the language that Thor and Woden were praised and glorified." The Nation, 17 May 1856.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, op. cit., pp.140-1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp.138-147; Samuel, op. cit., p.288.

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<sup>22</sup> B.R.L., Franciscan Registers, op. cit., passim; Phillimore, W. P., Whitfield, J. L., Williams, P. E., (eds.), Warwickshire Parish Registers: Baptism's, Phillimore, London, 1904, p.2; Showell, op. cit., pp.243-4.

<sup>23</sup> In the words of a Franciscan priest the Church “was first defaced and most of it burrent within to near ye vallue of 400lb., by ye Lord Dellermare's order upon ye 26 of November, 1688, and ye day seven night following ye rabble of Birmingham begon to pul ye Church ad Convent down and saesed not until they had pulled up ye foundations.” Showell, *ibid*, pp.143-4.

<sup>24</sup> Showell, *ibid*, p.143; Keirnan, op. cit., p.31.

<sup>25</sup> Phillimore et. al., op. cit., p.2.

<sup>26</sup> Bossey J., The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1975, pp.306-310.

<sup>27</sup> Champ, 1981, op. cit., pp.343-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p.349.

<sup>29</sup> Greaney, op. cit., pp.18-19; Kiernan, op. cit., p.32; S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 4, “Sermon by Archbishop Thomas, L., Williams”, Metropolitan Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Birmingham: Centenary Souvenir, 1841-1941, Saint



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Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, [unknown date]; Handbook of Birmingham op. cit., p.113.

<sup>30</sup> Mole, op. cit., p.832.

<sup>31</sup> Metropolitan Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Birmingham: Centenary Souvenir, 1841-1941, op. cit. [no page numbers].

<sup>32</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475.

<sup>33</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.32. Father Peach noted that the Irish increased in numbers after 1820 (in line with Bossey), this could be a reason for the need for a school at this time. "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475; Champ, J. F., "The Demographic Impact of Irish Immigration on Birmingham Catholicism 1800-1850", in Sheils, W. J., and Wood, D., Studies in Church History: The Churches, Ireland and the Irish, Vol. 25, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, pp.233-5.

<sup>34</sup> Greaney, op. cit., p.25.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, op. cit., p.3; Arnstein, Walter L., Protestant Versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns, University of Missouri Press, London, 1982, p.5.

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<sup>36</sup> B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers: Schools, 1843-1900, M7, Annual Report of the Catholic Day and Sunday Schools and Other Charities Attached to Saint Peter's Chapel Birmingham for the Year 1838.

<sup>37</sup> Named Saint Joseph's and under the guidance of a Miss Bond. Greaney, op. cit., p.25.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid; S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2, Extracts from Saint Mary's Annals.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Birmingham Catholic Magazine, Vol. 2., No. 19., October 1913, p.389.

<sup>41</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.32. Showell disagrees with this number stating that there were seven churches in 1848 which seems unlikely. Showell, op. cit., p.244.

<sup>42</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.398.

<sup>43</sup> Gill dates this foundation incorrectly as 1851, this date probably refers to its removal in 1852 to Hagley Road. Ibid, p.375.

<sup>44</sup> Greaney, op. cit., p.27. The schools were said to be educating 15,000 pupils by 1884. Showell, op. cit., p.224.

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<sup>45</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.375; Kiernan, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>46</sup> Handbook of Birmingham, op. cit., p.113.

<sup>47</sup> Keirnan, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>48</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.375.

<sup>49</sup> Keirnan, op. cit., pp.35-6.

<sup>50</sup> Showell, op. cit., p.244. Although the Handbook of Birmingham states that the foundation was in 1876. Handbook of Birmingham, op. cit., p.114.

<sup>51</sup> Greaney, op. cit., pp.27-8.

<sup>52</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.43.

<sup>53</sup> Greaney, op. cit., pp.27-8; Showell, op. cit., p.278.

<sup>54</sup> B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, M7, Journal of the Catholic Sunday School, 16 January 1815. It is possible that this Mr. Faherty is related to or is the same James Faherty, of 59 1/2 Bull Street who began to appear as a die sinker in the Birmingham Trade directories in 1830. B.R.L., Trade Directories for Birmingham 1830-1860.



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<sup>55</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.475.

<sup>56</sup> B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Schools, 1834-1900, M7, Catholic Day and Sunday School Reports, 1834.

<sup>57</sup> Attendance at this time showed an average for girls of 74 on a week day and 82 on a Sunday, with 62 and 46 boys respectively. B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Schools, 1834-1900, M7, Annual Report of the Catholic Day and Sunday Schools and Other Charities Attached to Saint Peter's Chapel Birmingham for the Year 1838.

<sup>58</sup> B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Schools, 1834-1900, M7, Subscribers and Friends to the Catholic Charity Schools in Birmingham 1843. There were also 13 Italian named subscribers that year. Total subscriptions to the Charity Schools for 1841-2 amounted to £459 0s 4s, with £142 17s coming from children's fees. Expenditure for that year was £450 19s 5d including the interest on borrowed money of £14 10s leaving a balance of £8 0s 11d.

<sup>59</sup> The son of John Hardman senior. Both were generous benefactors to the Catholic Church in Birmingham. His father made his fortune as a manufacturer of a very Birmingham product - decorative metalwork - and prospered in the wake of the gothic revival. On his death in 1844 a public procession of the Catholics of Birmingham followed his remains from Handsworth to Saint Chad's. The Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, records that "there was no interference by Protestants", suggesting his respectability throughout the town as well as a perceived threat felt by

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the Sisters from Protestants in the area. Throughout England many wealthy English Catholics funded the establishment and maintenance of institutions for the Irish arrivals. The Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, Vol. II, The Catholic Publication Society Company, New York, 1933, p.314; Gwynn, op. cit., p.270; Bossey, op. cit., p.350.

<sup>60</sup> B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Schools, 1834-1900, M7, Saint Chad's School Board Minutes, 21 August and 11 September 1849.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Kelly and John Delaney were struck off the school list for late admission. B.A.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Schools, M7, Log Book of Saint Chad's Boys School, pp.24, 32.

<sup>62</sup> Greaney, op. cit., pp.27-8.

<sup>63</sup> Catholic Opinion, 30 January 1867.

<sup>64</sup> Chinn, 1999, op. cit., p.54.

<sup>65</sup> The convent at Handsworth was only the second established outside of Ireland by the sisterhood and the oldest still extant, the first being in London which was destroyed during World War II. Sister McAuley commented in a letter that "the opening in Birmingham will give promise to future establishments..." giving some indication of

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the importance attached to the Birmingham Convent. S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1., Letter from McAuley to Thomas Walsh, 9 April 1840.

<sup>66</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., pp.308-320; The Concise Dictionary of National Biography, op. cit., p.3266.

<sup>67</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., p.320; S.M.C.H.A., Box 11, Cuttings from the Sisters of Mercy History.

<sup>68</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., pp.316-319.

<sup>69</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2. This figure is quoted in "Petition for Help for the Poor School", 1871.

<sup>70</sup> The choice of Saint George's Day as the official opening can not have been a coincidence. The attempt to subvert the perception of Catholics as disloyal to the British state - in a town that had a strong anti-Catholic presence - is a possible explanation for the selection of this symbolically patriotic foundation date.

<sup>71</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, "Account of the Establishment of the House of Mercy, Saint Mary's Convent", July 26 1847. This was a publicly distributed leaflet with the aim of raising funds for the House of Mercy. Most of the day to day



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running costs were provided for by the labours of the “inmates” and the difference plus any debts and interest payable on the initial outlay was what was probably in need.

<sup>72</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., p.319.

<sup>73</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Letter from Rev. G. Jefferies, 1865; Chinn, 1999, op. cit., p.72. Five Irish women were teaching in this school in 1851. Saint Mary’s Boys School in Will Street was expanded in 1865 and cost £15 per annum in rent. This covered the house attached, the land for the new schoolroom was given rent free.

<sup>74</sup> A flyer was produced for the citizens of Birmingham in order to cater for the expansion of poor Catholic children in need of education “The Sisters of Mercy beg to solicit the charitable assistance of the benevolent to provide funds, with which to build additional schools for the many poor children that flock to them for education. The present schools have become quite too crowded for the number in attendance, in consequence of which notice has been given, that *the government grant will not be continued until new schools are erected*.” “Petition for the Help for Poor School”, op. cit., 1871.

<sup>75</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2, Note by unknown Sister regarding withdrawal of government funds, 20 August 1871.

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<sup>76</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 3, 1852 Results of Examinations for Teachers Certificate of Merit, 1852.

<sup>77</sup> He sent a cheque for four pounds to the Rev. Mother "if she will kindly accept it for the enlargement of the poor school house". S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Letter from John Henry Newman to Saint Mary's Convent, 3 May 1872.

<sup>78</sup> Petition for the Help for Poor School, op. cit., 1871.

<sup>79</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., p.320.

<sup>80</sup> This is presumably a reference to their moral instruction. S.M.C.H.A., Account of the Establishment of the House of Mercy, Saint Mary's Convent, op. cit.; S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Letter from Committee of Council on Education 15 May 1857.

<sup>81</sup> "Account of the Establishment of the House of Mercy, Saint Mary's Convent", op. cit.

<sup>82</sup> Ann Cooney, aged 14, Susan Milligan and Gertrude McNutty, aged 11, all entered the home in 1884, Bridget Kelly in 1885, Catherine McHale and Mary Ann McHale in 1886, followed by Anne McHale in 1891. Ellen Doherty was admitted in 1890, Rebecca Coley in 1892, Mary Galagher in 1894, and Margaret Nolan and Ellen O'Hara

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in 1895. Anne Grogan entered at the age of 14 in 1897, and Ellen Murphy in 1898. S.M.C.H.A., Carton 7, Saint Joseph's Home Register 1884-1930.

<sup>83</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Letter from the Committee of Council on Education, Downing Street, London, May 15 1857.

<sup>84</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., p.319.

<sup>85</sup> S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2, "Petition for Help for Poor School", 1871. The Middle class day school taught English, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, sacred and profane history, as well as plane and ornamental needle work. Fees were £1.1s. per quarter for over seven years of age, 10s. 6d. for those under seven. Lessons in music, French, drawing, dancing and calisthenic exercise were extra ranging from 2s. 6d. to £1. S.M.C.H.A., Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2, Terms of the Middle Class Day School.

<sup>86</sup> Leaves From the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy: England and the Colonies, op. cit., p.320.

<sup>87</sup> Index to Birmingham Catholic Sick Club Register of Members, 1795-1893, op. cit., passim.

<sup>88</sup> "The State of the Irish Poor in Birmingham", op. cit., p.476.



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<sup>89</sup> B.A.A., Annual Report of the Catholic Day and Sunday Schools and Other Charities attached to Saint Peter's Chapel Birmingham for the Year 1838, op. cit.

<sup>90</sup> In 1861 Saint Chad's donated £68.13s, Saint Peter's £10.7s.6d, Saint Ann's in Alcester Street £3, and Saint Mary's Convent £28.3s. Griffith G., History of the Free Schools, Colleges, Hospital's and Asylums of Birmingham and their Fulfillment, William Tweedie, London, 1861, p.298.

<sup>91</sup> Showell, op. cit., p.218.

<sup>92</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.6.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Anti-Catholicism in Nineteenth Century Britain and Birmingham.**

“Who does not know that throughout Europe The term “Irish man” is synonymous with “Papist” while in the question of religion by “Englishman” is understood as one who glories in his contumacy and hostility to Catholicity.”<sup>1</sup>

From the late 1790s onwards there was a Protestant evangelical revival within the British Isles that reached its apogee during the late 1850s, coinciding with the revival and re-establishment of Roman Catholicism and its hierarchy in Britain. In Ireland, evangelicals dominated Irish Protestantism and were influential throughout the empire and at home and the movement came to be the prevailing form of popular Protestant worship within the Britain state. Their influence upon State and Nation was profound playing a role in the great reform movements of the century such as the abolition of slavery, the introduction of the Factory Acts, public health measures and much more. However, the downside of popular Protestantism was its hostility to Roman Catholicism. Throughout the nineteenth century anti-Catholic “No-Popery” activity was a significant force within British society stimulated by a number of flash points such as Catholic Emancipation in 1829,<sup>2</sup> the ongoing tensions created by Anglo-Catholicism and the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in the 1850s. Another factor in the rise of anti-Catholicism was the visible presence of Catholic Irish immigrants throughout the period and the real or imagined threat

that they posed to the nationally articulated religious, economic, imperial, political and moral hegemony.

Tensions between Catholics and Protestants led to serious clashes throughout the century, most notably from evangelical lecturers such as Birmingham's own William Murphy who instigated mass disturbances throughout Britain from 1867 to 1871. The influence of political/religious organisations such as the Protestant Association, the Evangelical Alliance, Protestant Alliance and the Loyal Orange Institution or Orange Order, as well as many others, played major and minor parts in anti-Catholic (and by extension anti-Irish) agitation throughout the century leading to sporadic outbreaks of violence and widespread discrimination.

In Birmingham there had been long term, medium term and short term underlying factors that had led to anti-Catholic/Irish outbursts from the population. The most serious mass outbreak against the Birmingham Catholic/Irish population came in 1867 during a series of lectures by the aforementioned William Murphy, sponsored by an evangelical/political group, the Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union. During a week of rioting in 1867 allegedly up to 100,000 people took to the streets in a riotous situation articulated towards the mainly Irish Catholic population of the town, resulting in hundreds of arrests and injuries at least one connected murder and mass attacks on one of the "Irish quarters" of Birmingham. The events that Murphy's lectures triggered became a national concern and were widely reported with questions being raised in the House of Commons and petitions presented to the Home Secretary for the instigator to be banned from public speaking in the future.



But what forces were at work that led to such an outburst of intolerance and violence in what is generally acknowledged as the premier liberal town and city of the Victorian age? Why were the Irish singled out for special attention from the crowd and not the Catholic English? How did the Irish react to this violence?

The problems created by the perception of Irish migrants as diseased, morally corrupt, subversive, seditious and violent criminals, were underpinned by the long term hostilities to Catholics created by the Reformation. As Hickman has argued, the Reformation in England was the defining epoch in the formation of English national identity. Internally, the war of the Reformation centralised the state into a unitary kingdom. This project necessitated the unification of Ireland and Wales to England to secure resources and negate potential counter-revolution. The process of centralisation destroyed the feudal system to a great extent resulting by the time of the Civil War in an economic underpinning to the identification of “the free born Englishman” against the “despotic” Roman Catholic feudalised system. The securing of parliamentary sovereignty and Protestantism in the new constitution paved the way for the “Glorious Revolution” which confirmed an English nationalist identification (as well as the state) as Protestant, and the role played by anti-Catholicism was fundamental in this process.<sup>3</sup>

Theologians and radical politicians from both sides of the rationalist/religious debate accepted the role of Protestantism as the touchstone of national identity. The Protestant Church saw the struggle of the Reformation, Civil War and Glorious Revolution as patriotic proof that Protestantism was the source of English greatness. Radicals on the other hand, saw popish despotism as anti-rationalist and manipulatory

and therefore to be disabused, a Protestant based constitutional polity being essentially more desirable than a mystic based theocracy.<sup>4</sup> Linda Colley's thesis - as discussed in the introduction - has argued for the centrality of Protestantism within the politically motivated project to mobilise the English and the Scottish, via the Act of Union in 1707, into a national unit to combat the threat from Catholic France.<sup>5</sup>

The Irish in Britain have been at the receiving end of official political discrimination in Britain since at least 1413 preceding the Reformation and Counter Reformation struggles.<sup>6</sup> In England, Catholics were a religious and political threat during the post-Reformation period and seen as untrustworthy in their cross loyalties. If Catholics were a potential threat to the state then Irish Catholics had a double jeopardy linked to cultural differences. Historically the Irish (and indeed all Gaelic speaking peoples) have been represented by the English as "barbarous heathens" in a struggle with the "civilised Christians". They have been represented as hopelessly unenlightened and underdeveloped since at least the Norman period. This attitude to perceived Irish economic competence would be replayed in the following modern industrial era. From the Norman Conquest onwards, the pastoral, decentralised and economically marginal society that Ireland was - organised around Gaelic cultural traditions - provided an antithesis to the English agrarian, feudalised, village and town dwelling, politically centralised and more affluent. The Irish were seen by contemporary commentators as unable and unfit to govern themselves due to their perceived backwardness linked to their economic and cultural articulation and a growing sense of English/British national identity from the Reformation that of course saw itself - as in all nationalisms - as better than other nations/races.<sup>7</sup> A resonance of this process of the peripheral backward Irish is still with us in the "thick paddy" stereotype.



The English were contemptuous of Irish civil society, especially their system of law and justice. It is fundamental to any group seeking political and economic dominance over another to have their version of legitimate and illegitimate actions accepted and a main battleground is the ideological concept of law. The Gaelic laws of commutation of murder for cash payment, right of illegitimate sons to inherit estates, coequal inheritance of male heirs and acceptance of close kin wedlock, were all seen as making Gaelic law inferior to English and were represented as such. This antipathy was underpinned by the ongoing violent resistance to English or Anglo-Irish rule that reinforced the barbarian stereotype.<sup>8</sup> This also created an historically discursive stereotype of the “Celt” as prone to violence, criminality and untrustworthiness. This hostility and persecution has continued to a greater or lesser degree throughout the post-Reformation period until the present day. Quite simply the Irish were the original “outlaws” that were “beyond the pale”. The persecution of English Catholics after the reformation gave the Irish a double jeopardy as Catholic and “Celtic”.

The 18th century was an important epoch defined as it was by conflict between Protestant Britain and an envious Catholic Europe with Jacobite rebellions and threats to the state. In Ireland, agrarian violence encouraged by secret societies such as the Whiteboys in Munster and the Hearts of Oak and Steel in Ulster underlined the rebellious violent discourse of Irish/British relations.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 18th century, although the state was more secure, anti-Catholicism was still present in official and un-official forms such as anti-Catholic legislation and anti-Catholic violence as demonstrated by the 300 deaths during the Gordon Riots over a Catholic Relief Act in 1780.



While anti-Catholicism was a constant factor in British society throughout the post-Reformation period, it is probably better to describe the nineteenth century revival of anti-Catholicism as a reactionary movement centred around Protestant sensitivities to a number of major Catholic/Protestant issues rather than a true anxiety about the vulnerability of the British Protestant state which was secure by this time. The ructions surrounding Catholic Emancipation, Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy and Anglo-Catholicism were significant, but there were also an ongoing series of low level agitations centred around national and local symbolic issues during the nineteenth century. Issues such as the permanent settlement of a government grant to the Catholic seminary in Maynooth Ireland, the question of inspection of convents and whether Catholic priests should be allowed to minister to their flock in government institutions such as prisons and workhouses became - under the influence of prominent establishment figures - contentious anti-Catholic causes. Subsequently, Protestants rallied to the cause of defending their faith in the twilight period of the Protestant revival during the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>10</sup>

By the turn of the nineteenth century the strength of the Protestant hegemony was unassailable in Britain and a major pole of British identity. However, for an ideology that was endemic and affected all classes of society, the persistence of nineteenth century anti-Catholicism has been a somewhat neglected part of Victorian history. There have been a number of monographs and articles that have attempted to outline the processes and manifestations of this phenomenon but there is still a large amount of work waiting to be researched, especially in relation to the manifestations of anti-Catholicism in England. Although writers such as Arnstein, Norman and Paz all point to the importance and normalcy of anti-Catholicism in Victorian Britain (as Paz puts it

“the fear and loathing of Roman Catholicism was a major part of the nineteenth century cultural context”)<sup>11</sup> investigations into this phenomena have been relatively few.

Walter Arnstein gives a number of reasons for this historiographical lacuna, primarily the lack of an historical motive. Firstly for Arnstein, there is an assumption within the historiography that anti-Catholicism was not important as the Victorian age has often been described as one of increasing political, legal and religious reform. Victorian Britain has been interpreted as the age of religious tolerance and revival where Catholics advanced into the highest offices in the government and empire, finally breaking the Anglican monopoly in the civil service, elementary education and local and national government. Also important for Arnstein is the fact that the historiography offers no well known anti-Catholic figures or pivotal defining events so popular with Whig historians. Those figures who are involved are relatively minor and events that signify anti-Catholicism are seen as a peculiarity within the ongoing liberal reform of the Victorian age. Arnstein also points out the reluctance of labour historians to explore the popular bigotry of the English working class, tending to focus on the rise of proletarian consciousness and class struggle with employers/capitalists. Finally, Arnstein notes that twentieth century Roman Catholic historians tend to concentrate on pre-nineteenth century Recusant history, the Victorian age being also seen as a period of reform and toleration of Roman Catholicism. Again they tend to emphasise the breaking of the Anglican monopoly of parliament, civil service, education and Oxford and Cambridge. Within these strands of historiography the post 1832 outbreaks of anti-Catholic hostility and violence are seen as an aberration rather than a theme. Arnstein suggests that contrary to this historiographical theme anti-Catholicism and



Protestant versus Catholic was an important part of Victorian history and he also notes that the tirades of religious prejudice and hostility unleashed on Catholics in the era were by no means a one way process - Catholics were not passive in this conflict.<sup>12</sup>

E. R. Norman also notes the long tradition of anti-Catholicism in England, pointing to its importance, common currency and wide acceptance throughout “Victorian civilisation”. Norman makes plain the impetus given to anti-Catholicism by mass migration from Ireland, drawing on a long term post Reformation tradition resulting in intermittent localised outbreaks of violence against the Catholic migrant. Apart from the role of the ordinary clergy in articulating anti-Catholicism, Norman stresses the part played by itinerant preachers in spreading prejudice among the working classes, as typified by the likes of Protestant evangelist William Murphy. Norman also notes the political influence on the upper stratas of society of the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800. The large, newly incorporated Catholic population of Ireland brought demands for Catholic Emancipation and a series of other divisive appeals. The Irish Question was at the heart of government and the debates were instrumental in stimulating anti-Catholic ideological controversy and rhetoric in Parliament, the Lords and national press.<sup>13</sup>

Violence has been a constant factor in English Protestant-Catholic relations from the 17th and 18th centuries peaking in the mid-Victorian period before declining. The fear of Roman Catholic disloyalty was stoked by the violence in Ireland between “Orange and Green” which was mirrored to some extent - particularly where Irish migrants had settled in significant numbers - in Britain. Norman states that those who were involved in “Anti-Popery” agitation during the mid-Victorian period were mainly *ad hoc*



organisations that sprang from some issue but soon faded as the heat went out of the situation. It is certainly true that these issues were also political “hobby horses” used for medium and short term political advantage. The organisational exception to this short-termism was the Orange Order. Norman argues that those who were involved in anti-Catholic agitations were a dying breed, the last of a line of constitutional defenders who were reacting against rapid economic, social and political change, and although waning in importance throughout the century, were pivotal in certain situations. The piecemeal withering of the Anglican dominated parts of the constitution that went on throughout the century engendered great constitutional debates which fed the rhetorical fires of “No Popery” and the underlying Protestant nature of the state. The granting of an annual then permanent subvention to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth in 1845 was a case in point, generating an annual debate in parliament - along with the demands for state inspection and regulation of nunneries - throwing up as they did much consternation, rhetoric and sordid imaginings over the morals and behaviour of Catholic monks and nuns throughout the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>14</sup>

Another issue of contention was resistance to the appointment of Roman Catholic chaplains in workhouses, jails reformatories and the army.<sup>15</sup> Earlier, the liberalisation of anti-Catholic legislation provoked reactions from the Protestant establishment and its supporters in the masses’ reaction against the granting of civil rights to Catholics was one of the most contentious political questions of the century.<sup>16</sup> Arnstein points out that Catholic Emancipation coincided with the evangelical revival within Britain and that this contributed to defining identities and notions of difference between the communities.<sup>17</sup> Also connected to this revival was the threat posed to each religion of conversion from one to another or “leakage”. The controversies surrounding Anglo-

Catholicism in its many forms - Tractarianism, "Puseyism", Ritualism, the Oxford Movement (with its high profile converts to Catholicism) etc. - crystallised many fervent evangelical Protestants' fears that the very church, state and constitution was under siege from Rome.<sup>18</sup>

The English Protestant establishment was beginning to worry about the spread of Anglo-Catholicism by the 1840s. According to Paz they were not only challenged by the theological differences but also by the economic and political resonances that the Tractarian movement's concern with social issues and its perceived criticism of laissez-faire economics.<sup>19</sup> Anti-Tractarianism was strong in Birmingham in the early 1850s and the main concern of the Birmingham Protestant Association and Orange Order in the late 1860s.<sup>20</sup> By the 1870s however, this form of anti-Catholicism was a spent force and although there was some resistance to Anglo-Catholicism, it was of a marginal nature.<sup>21</sup>

Also during the 1850s, the issues surrounding the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy - often referred to as the "Papal Aggression" - sparked another wave of Protestant consternation over Catholic loyalties. The issue united Anglicans and dissenters against the "common enemy" resulting in the incongruous situation of dissenters supporting the religion of the Crown against another, the unifying issue of the Reformation overriding their criticisms of the establishment's religion. This cross class appeal was closely linked to the ongoing nationalist project of the rapidly evolving modern British nation state that was mindful of the need to incorporate the masses into the ruling elite's notion of Britishness in order to unify and standardise the nation state. The question of legal measures against the new Catholic establishment dominated



parliament throughout 1851 resulting in the introduction of the Ecclesiastical Titles Act of that year outlawing Catholic assumption of the same on pain of a £100 fine.<sup>22</sup> All these issues occupied the minds and lives of Protestant English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish activists throughout the century to varying degrees according to the medium and short term historical, political, economic and social contexts.

At the centre of the dichotomy between the Protestants and Catholics during the Victorian period and a long term underlying factor of anti-Catholicism in England were theological disputes rather than strict threats to the state - although the contrived menace of papal despotism was an oft used rhetorical device used to stoke the fires of Protestant paranoia. First for Protestants, the position of the Catholic priest as the mediator between God and laity - soul and salvation - was denounced as irrational. But it was more than this. The Protestant Bible, read individually in the vernacular of the nation state, was privileged as the holder of religious truth. This truth was available to all who could read English rather than having to be interpreted by a privileged priesthood versed in the sacred language of Latin. Protestantism was seen in many ways as the religion of modernity and the individual, but more importantly it became the religion of the British nation state and a most powerful strand of British nationalism. Secondly, the claim by the papacy to be the sole head of the Christian Church was seen as a slight against the "true" head Christ himself. Thirdly - and perhaps most importantly - the prophecies of the Bible were taken literally by many and they foretold the downfall of the pope as a precondition to the second coming.<sup>23</sup> The second long term determinant was connected to the Reformation and its aftermath, the historical English anxiety of divided Roman Catholic loyalties and the view by some political actors and the representation of Catholic as standing for absolutist politics. The nature of the Protestant Constitution following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was



antithetical to Roman Catholic doctrine being formed in opposition to it and from which British civil and legal freedoms flowed. Also, within the ideological realm was the medium term perceived threat to the Victorian patriarchal family, the role of the male Catholic priest being interpreted as undermining the male head of the household, their inconvenience blurring the moral force of what was right and wrong.<sup>24</sup> Mix these theological political and hegemonic determinants with the privileged status of the Church of England and Protestantism in the project of building a Protestant British nation state, there is left potential for a heady long term historical/political/theological ideology of anti-Catholicism.

Paz argues that post-Reformation anti-Catholicism was rooted in three fundamental ideas, that of the Protestant Constitution, the Norman Yoke and Providentialism. These touchstones of a Protestant national identity were shaped by the Victorian memory of post-Reformation history determining their understanding of Roman Catholicism as essentially an antithesis to the notion of "the free born Englishman" in constitutional moral and political terms. The idea of the Norman Yoke - which originated in the late 18th century - complemented these ideas by a discourse of the Norman suppression of Saxon "democracy" with papal support and the imposition of foreign rulers and landlords. Providentialism was the ideology of divine destiny within the affairs of men and nations. God had made Britain and her empire great because "He" approved of Protestantism and wished to reward his faithful with economic and political power.<sup>25</sup> These three desiderata of English Protestant identity thereby conjoining theology with politics in the religious realm to compliment the legal and moral strands intrinsic within the constitution and historical Saxon foundation myth - ideas that would later inform racial notions of Anglo-Saxonism.

Paz's argument has resonances with Lynda Colley's thesis regarding the formation of "Britishness" from the 16th and 17th centuries. Taking Colley's and Paz's arguments further, arguably this invention of Britishness - ideologically similar to the invention of Protestant England - can be split into internal and external aspects. Internally, the fear of an anti-Protestant challenge to the state, signifying a despotic regime as articulated by the "Norman Yoke" discourse, was perceived as a possibility through the re-invention of "Popery" at home and the idea of Protestants as victims. Externally, the historical and ongoing violent political struggles in Ireland along with the failure to convert the island to the Protestant faith, signified again the Irish were the premier external resistive "Other" of Victorian imperial colonisation. Arguably, this in effect helped secure the internally imagined British/Protestant community together by providing a pole of opposition from which to judge their own discreteness of national identity. A pole that would become increasingly important in British urban life as Catholic Irish numbers in England increased. Also, medium and short term contextual factors of passive and violent resistance to British rule in Ireland brought Fenian bombs on to the streets of England and obduracy, confrontation, filibustering and eventually the fall of governments in Westminster. The fear generated by revolutions in Europe and the "dangerous classes" at home and abroad were an extra contextual ingredient contributing to a religious, imperial, economic, political and therefore national anxiety that at home became focused on the most visible group that fitted the criteria of dangerous "Other"- the Irish.

Into the long term historical anti-Catholic and Gaelic strand of British history was woven the medium term thread of religious revivalism in British as a whole and political instability in Ireland and the threat (and eventual reality) of disestablishment of the Protestant Church in Ireland - then came the mass influx of Great Famine migrants.



This influx reinforced and focused anti-Catholicism upon the newly arrived Catholic Irish.<sup>26</sup> Add the opportunities this presented to Protestant political entrepreneurs, especially when economic and political conditions were unfavourable in the sense of working class job competition and violent Irish nationalism, at a time of urban expansion and urban structural strain, the political potentialities presented by scapegoating a visible minority become clear.

One of the major medium and short term determinants for the outbreak of violence in Birmingham in 1867 was the campaign of Fenian nationalist violence in Britain that had dominated Irish popular politics in the 1860s, and was attempting to instigate a revolutionary war in 1867. Fenian terrorism in England created great problems for the British state that had little or no experience of dealing with such a problem. This was one of the first anti-imperialist and armed terrorist groups the government had to deal with in the modern period. Being an overtly nationalist revolt and so close to home made its impact more salient in anti-imperial terms than the more remote and negligible nationalist Indian Mutiny of 1857. Also, the revolt represented the culmination of violent Irish nationalism and anti-British agitation aimed at overthrowing the state stemming from other secret societies such as the Defenders, United Irishmen and others of the previous century. As such it was a defining issue in the notion of Irishness and loyalty to the state. Having said this, Irish Catholics had been a long-term problem since the Reformation as has been noted, this medium term political movement in Ireland, Britain and the colonies reinforced many of these notions in this period of colonial supremacy. Although the Protestant ascendancy was at its height and secure for the time being, the Fenians were to show the first cracks in the edifice of the



invincible British empire and as such were very dangerous in hegemonic terms if weak in military might.

Inspired by Italian nationalists the Fenian Brotherhood was formed in 1858 in the USA. In 1866 the Fenians launched a number of attacks on Canada. An assault on Chester Castle on the 11th of February 1867 was the start of a campaign that was to raise anti-Irishness in British to a fever pitch. 1,000 armed Fenians were foiled in their attempt to capture the armoury at Chester and ship the arms to Ireland. In March 1867 the Fenians rose in Ireland calling upon the British working class to join them.<sup>27</sup> The rebellion was a failure and had collapsed by April but it did much to heighten tensions between the English and Irish in Britain. This period was also at the height of the Reform League's agitations in Britain with its mass demonstrations along with the Fenian organisation still intact on the "mainland" that was calling for the British working class to revolt, the authorities were forced to let a demonstration for Reform of 150,000 people in Hyde Park on 6 May to proceed for fear of the consequences of its repression.<sup>28</sup> Also the economic situation was less than advantageous in 1866 and was to get worse in 1868 heightening unemployment and therefore job competition in Birmingham and leading to a great outburst of Reform activity in the town.<sup>29</sup> The 1867 Reform Act also ended the compounding of the rates leading to 35,000 poor being summonsed from October 1867. The depression of 1868 increased greatly the amount of begging and out relief causing resentment.<sup>30</sup> The press within Britain was infused with many false accounts of Fenian activities between 1867 and 1868 including the imminence of rebellion. The hysterical reporting stoked the fires under the anti-Irish discourse in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Within this context, the working class Irish inhabiting the classic slum were easily identified as a double menace. Thus a moral and political panic

centred on revolution oozed from the mythologised dangerous classes that inhabited the ghetto of the British political imagination.

Denvir described Birmingham as one of the most active centres of Fenianism in Britain, commenting that “there cannot be a doubt but that a considerable number of Irishmen there were enrolled in the revolutionary organisation.”<sup>32</sup> There was certainly a branch of the Irish nationalist National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick in Birmingham as early as 1861 who were precursors to more successful organisations and were often infiltrated by Fenians.<sup>33</sup> Denvir makes the connection between the uprising, Irish membership in Birmingham and the exploitation of this by Murphy.<sup>34</sup> Certainly Birmingham was, as the main manufacturer and supplier of arms in Britain, supplying the Fenian movement in Britain and Ireland even before the 1867 rising.<sup>35</sup> Hundreds of rifles, pistols and thousands of rounds of ammunition were procured between 1865 and 1867. Michael Davitt, leading member of the Irish branch of Fenianism, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, was arrested in 1870 on Paddington Station with £150 in his pocket to pay for 50 pistols that were being brought down from Irish owned gun manufacturers in Birmingham.<sup>36</sup> In January 1867 upwards of 2,000 persons were sworn in as special constables in Birmingham - 650 of them members of the Volunteer Rifle Corps - in response to a government request to police the “Fenian Scare”. Spread over the various wards of the city they had their headquarters in the “Irish area” of Moor Street, presumably at the police station and gaol there. Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. Ewart when giving the orders stated:

“The defensive measures to be taken under present circumstances must, as far as possible, be of a quasi-permanent character, that is to



say, must be calculated to last for some weeks and possibly throughout the winter.”<sup>37</sup>

They were drilled regularly and wore a blue ribbon to distinguish them as specials. This shows that the town was aware and taking measures against Fenian activity just five months before the outbreak of the anti-Irish /Catholic Murphy riots. Birmingham was again put on “Fenian” alert in January 1881 where arms manufacturers were put under guard in case of attack.<sup>38</sup>

The long-standing violent nature of anti-Catholicism in Birmingham from the 17th century has already been noted. However, political/religious rioting was also present in the 18th century. A blending of political and sectarian dispute between the High Church Tory faction and a dissenting Liberal faction resulted in riot in 1715.<sup>39</sup> The town was more inclined to riot at times of economic distress and war as happened in 1762 and failed crops led to serious food riots in 1795.<sup>40</sup> There had also been riots in 1812 connected to the Luddites and extreme economic distress and war. A year later sectarian anxiety in Birmingham was directed against the dissenting chapels in Bond Street, Belmont Row and Ladywell Walk. This time the riotous crowd also sacked the Synagogue in Severn Street.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the most sectarian/political disturbances of the 18th century were the so called Priestly Riots of 1791. Closely following the Revolution in France that threatened the British state, a political and theological dispute arose between the Church of England clergy and leading dissenter and intellectual Joseph Priestley and the Unitarians among others. This led to three days of rioting and Priestley’s house and chapel were burnt and he was driven from the town.<sup>42</sup> There were also serious Chartist riots in 1839.<sup>43</sup>



As has been already noted, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Catholic priests still wore layman's clothes and the liturgy was confined. The church of Saint Peter's was disguised and had no windows facing the street. There were no statues, font or confessional.<sup>44</sup> This was to change dramatically by the middle of the century and the Irish were fundamental in this revival and renewed confidence in English Catholicism in Birmingham and by association with the Anglo-Catholic movement the whole nation. This would have repercussions within the staunch Protestant "resistance" in Birmingham that itself grew nationally influential in moulding the nation's perceptions of the Irish and Catholics in Britain.

The resonances created by the constitutional debates and arguments surrounding Catholic Emancipation led to much controversy in the whole of Britain as well as Birmingham. An English Catholic wrote to the Birmingham press in 1825 regarding "the Lies and Misrepresentations against the Catholic Religion" illustrating the sorts of debates and media tactics used by the opponents of Catholicism in the town and country. The writer also makes a connection with the persecution of Christ by the Jews and Catholics by Protestants:

"Our blessed Saviour and his holy Religion have been treated barbarously. Both have been called impostors and deceivers: both have suffered under oppression: both have been vilified and slandered by bad books, by false reports, by lying discourses and by unjust laws...The Catholic religion is reviled, hissed at, ridiculed, rejected, scorned, loaded with infamy, chained down with heavy laws, and as

far as possible martyred.... "crucify, crucify him!" said the Jews: "No Popery! No Popery!" say others."<sup>45</sup>

At this time the Catholics of Britain began to advance a more coherent response to anti-Catholicism and at its head was Birmingham priest of Saint Peter's Chapel the Rev. Thomas Michael McDonnell. McDonnell was a political activist and a close friend with Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell. He was commenting as early as 1828 on how the efforts to bring Protestants and Catholics together was undermined by the role of "a number of emissaries sent among them from a distant Society for exasperating feelings between them", a reference to anti-Catholic organisations such as the Orange Order.<sup>46</sup> McDonnell was concerned to bring the Birmingham Catholic community out of the ghetto and to make them a social force within the town. He took an active part in politics and was closely involved in a number of liberal causes such as parliamentary reform, abolition of church rates and Catholic Emancipation. He had political sympathies with the Irish and was involved with the campaign for just treatment of the Catholic population in Ireland and his strong attachment to the Irish cause. His political activities - such as organising the Birmingham Catholic Association as well as visits by O'Connell in 1825 and 1832 - made him popular among the Irish of Birmingham but estranged him from some of his fellow churchmen.<sup>47</sup> He organised meetings calling for Emancipation and attended, and was jostled out of, anti-Emancipation meetings in the town. Many Protestants were said to attend his lectures.<sup>48</sup> Other clergy with Irish nationalist sympathies in Birmingham included Father Sherlock of Saint Michael's and Bishop Ullathorne was known to have sympathies with the Irish cause even though he was against secret societies.<sup>49</sup>



In 1829 a handbill distributed on the streets of Birmingham ascribed to "A Loyal and True Protestant" spoke out in defence of Catholics in the town, country and empire at their emancipation, while calling for violent opposition to the Act of Union to be stopped, a reference to the violence in Ireland and among Irish nationalists in the rest of Britain:

"Fellow Townsmen, - YOU ARE NOT TO BE SO DECEIVED, *you* do not require to be told, that *true loyalty* to our King and attachment to our excellent Constitution, is neither confined to districts, nor dependent on any *particular Creed or Form of Worship*...Fellow Townsmen - Most of you must have had some intercourse with your Catholic neighbours. Have you found them deficient in the social duties of life? Do they not make as good Fathers, Husbands, Masters and Servants, as you find among other denominations of Christians? The question then is not (as is falsely and wickedly represented) *whether Popery or Protestantism shall be the Religion of the Empire*, but whether a proportion of our fellow-subjects shall be deprived of their civil rights on account of difference of opinion on some speculative points of doctrine? Let US, my Fellow-Townsmen, *do all we can* to strengthen the hands of government in the *good and gracious work* they have now begun, and not seek, by clamour, violence and threatening, to oppose the union, diminish the strength, and lessen the prosperity of the British Empire."<sup>50</sup>



This text demonstrated the tensions within Protestant Birmingham towards their Catholic neighbours and how the liberal ethic was strong amongst some. The reference to social intercourse with Catholics, the misrepresentation of their desires towards the state, the denial of civil rights and appeal for unity is indicative of the pre-occupations of the time.

Another hand bill of around the same time refers to a Protestant loyalist conspiracy in the town. The document makes references to Catholic Emancipation in the sense that rebellion in Ireland was imminent and the repeal of the Test Acts was designed to alleviate this. The bill also refers to the use of graffiti and intemperate language. This bill notes that:

“...[those] representing themselves as exclusively Loyal, [who] are at this moment disgracing your walls with language bordering upon HIGH TREASON, and representing the KING and the DUKE OF WELLINGTON and other members of Administration, as CONSPIRING to overthrow the BRITISH CONSTITUTION, and to establish Popery in this kingdom, because, forsooth, they have recommended parliament to take into consideration the State of Ireland, with a view to heal the divisions and miseries that have for so long afflicted that part of the British dominion.”<sup>51</sup>

The pre-occupations of nineteenth century anti-Catholicism were thus demonstrable from the early part of the century in Birmingham .

By the 1830s the streets of Birmingham were peppered with various preachers, evangelists and religious proselytisers that would cause problems for each others' religious sensibilities. The evangelical Protestants of Birmingham were out in the streets looking for converts to their faith. One of these, a Mr. Clay, began in 1838 to set up persistent visits to the Irish areas of Birmingham and carried on the distribution of Bibles and the wisdom of his church up until at least 1840. He noted that the people of the Irish areas were mostly Roman Catholic and that not much could be achieved there by him. The Irish were particularly ungrateful for his ministrations, and were not adverse to informing him of their displeasure: "some of the Romans treated me with contempt, they were very forcible",<sup>52</sup> and whilst visiting some 22 families in Park Street - some Irish, some Italian - he remarked that "some of them insulted me and others were more sociable."<sup>53</sup> Just over a year later - demonstrating the hegemonic link that was often made between Irish/Catholic and environmental degradation - his journal records, "Visited Park Street. This is a wretched place. In this place we have an instance of the defects of Roman Catholicism." He also stated that the lodging houses of Park street were where "the very dregs of the country meet. They did not want a Bible as it would have been stolen".<sup>54</sup> He also notes of Allison Street - in which he had a room to hold meetings - that "this is a wicked street."<sup>55</sup> Despite these perceptions of the religious orientation of the poor inhabitants of the Birmingham slums contributing to their moral and physical position, he seemed to enjoy the polemical aspects of his visits. He held religious debates with Roman Catholics and their priests in the streets. One Catholic told him that:

"The difference between the Romans and the Protestants was this, the former prayed to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the latter



prayed to the Son instead of the Mother. To hear them speak is amusing, yet in many ways lamentable.”<sup>56</sup>

By 1840 he sounded almost optimistic about his work in promoting sobriety as this extract concerning Sheep Street shows.

“Here I come in contact with some of the lowest class of the Irish. There is a pleasing change in their moral development. Many drunkards have become sober. Many who in my former visits would not receive tracts will now accept of them. It appears that children sign the temperance pledge as well as their parents; so they will be trained up to the habit of sobriety.”<sup>57</sup>

The poverty and degradation is often referred to but the author seems most interested in their spiritual condition. The journal shows a great preoccupation with converting Roman Catholics and a tendency to link the physical and moral condition of the areas in which they lived to their religious faith rather than their class position or the poor environment. The evangelical gathering of converts continued. In the 1840s, the aforementioned Saint Peter's District Visiting Society was active in fishing for new souls and distributing Bibles. Other groups were active throughout the century and Birmingham was described by the Scottish Reformation Society as having “some of the most zealous Protestants in the empire” and chief among these in the 1840s was the Editor of the Birmingham Advertiser Thomas Ragg.<sup>58</sup>



The position of non-conformist was particularly important in Birmingham where local action was stimulated by the agency of Quakers, Unitarians, Congregationalists and theology and social action were closely linked. R.W. Dale minister of Carre's Lane Chapel and Baptist George Dawson were among the most vocal, and Dale was a national figure in the evangelical revival. Indeed, non-conformity tended to dominate over the Church of England in the town and was a fundamental part of Birmingham's political liberality. Between 1853 and 1893 the number of churches in Birmingham, Aston and Edgbaston doubled. A Church Extension Society was set up in 1865 to bring Protestant Christianity to the working class districts. Indeed the preaching in tents was advocated and pursued as a tool for evangelising the working classes in their districts and this was a feature of William Murphy's preaching.<sup>59</sup>

Although, as we have seen organised anti-Catholic groups were operating in Birmingham from as early as 1828, the first permanent Birmingham anti-Catholic society was set up in 1835 with Ragg at its head as the Church of England Lay Association with an anti-Nonconformist/Catholic outlook. The relative strength of Non-Conformists in Birmingham at this time helped channel attention to them and they were the main focus for the group, although the Association did campaign against Roman Catholic doctrine. It was with the rise of Irish migration around 1845, however, that Roman Catholicism became the main focus of agitation from Protestant groups focused upon the Maynooth and Catholic Relief issues. This demonstrates the opportunities Catholic Irish migration offered to anti-Catholic groups wishing to exploit the religio-ethnic card to further their political and spiritual agendas. At this time the Association distributed an hysterically rabid anti-Catholic magazine the Christian Watchman and Midland Counties' Protestant Magazine published in London for

consumption in the Birmingham area. The Association suffered from a lack of a popular campaigning issue, being too diffuse in their targets to raise much broad support and faded in significance in the late 1840s but was revived in the late 1860s at a time of electoral reform and Fenian activity.<sup>60</sup>

However, there was still agitation going on in Birmingham for the Protestant cause between these dates. A town meeting was held on 6 May 1844 to discuss proposals by Sir Robert Peel to endow Maynooth College out of public funds. There was a large attendance at the meeting which was addressed by Rev. P. Sibree among others who argued it was “unjust to the people of England and inefficient for any great purpose for Ireland.” Another meeting was held in June calling for the abolition of Parliament by the Queen to prevent the endowment of Maynooth College.<sup>61</sup>

The same can be said of the Loyal Orange Order which was also active in Birmingham and shared the same leadership with the Birmingham Protestant Association in the late 1860s at least. The aforementioned Thomas Ragg formed the Birmingham Protestant Association in 1847 with an initial membership of 14 in order to cement a permanent anti-Catholic organisation in Birmingham. The Birmingham Protestant Association was overtly anti-Catholic in its provocative, conspiratorial rhetoric and campaigned via publishing tracts and the organization of lectures and meetings. Over the next 12 months it organised seven lectures, organised a library and concentrated on recruitment.<sup>62</sup> On the first anniversary of the Birmingham Protestant Association held at Saint Peter’s Church Rooms 18 July 1848, Wragg spoke of the membership rising to 70-80 persons with 50 volumes in the library mainly connected to the “Revival



controversy". His report concluded that "the downfall of Papacy was at hand and the triumph of Protestantism near."<sup>63</sup>

The political motivations of the Birmingham Protestant Association is ably demonstrated in this extract from a speech by an active member called Richard Spooner. Spooner was a banker and partner (as well as political rival) to Thomas Attwood. He was active in Birmingham politics for many years, being the town's leading Conservative and won a famous victory for the party in 1843 when he was returned to Parliament as Birmingham's first Conservative MP.<sup>64</sup> As early as 1834 he organised support through the Loyal and Constitutional Association of which he was the Chair. The Conservatives organised respectable dinners addressed at length by the clergy on the subject of the interests of "the Protestant Religion and the Constitution in Church and State".<sup>65</sup> At their annual dinner in 1845 the Constitution congratulated Spooner on his victory and the progress Conservatives had made in the town, and in the following March adopted a petition on Maynooth opposing the increase in the grant and permanent endowment by Act of Parliament. A meeting was held in the Town Hall to support this campaign in April and petitions were sent to both the House of Commons and Lords.<sup>66</sup> Spooner lectured an assembled pre-election audience at the Bell Inn on 20 July 1847. Addressed to "The Protestant Electors of Birmingham" and distributed as a handbill at the time, the tract began with the words of a "National Ballad":

"Ye Protestants of England,  
With one consent rise,  
'Ere again the fires of Popery,



Light up your native skies!

The strife of war is coming,

The battle is at hand;

Let the traitor then beware who

Betrays his injured land.

O! cherish not in idolatry

Before the virgin shrine,

Who kneeled not to a wafer God,

Or consecrated wine.

O! cherish not within your breasts

The dormant power of Rome,

Or ye shall surely rue the day

Ye brought the reptile home.

Like the voice of many waters

O! let your cry be heard,

And teach your trimming statesmen

To fear the people's word."<sup>67</sup>

The tone of the handbill is thus set and a sectarian appeal is made to the "Protestant electors" of the town reminding them that "The Protestant Constitution is the bulwark of our liberties; shake it, and the Establishment is not worth a whit...". In the extract,

Spooner makes specific reference to his opposition to the Maynooth Grant and - as the ballad makes plain - there is a concerted effort to stir up the Protestant vote at a time of low support for the Conservatives at the polls in Birmingham.<sup>68</sup> This was hardly surprising as Spooner was a leading figure in the anti- Maynooth campaign and he was an acquaintance of fellow Warwickshire Conservative MP Charles Newdegate who famously agitated for and supported Spooner's constant attempts to repeal Peel's endowment to the leading Roman Catholic Seminary in Ireland - as well as for the inspection of convents. The other name that is intrinsically linked with this campaign was G. H. Whalley, MP for Peterborough, who was a close co-conspirator in the anti-Catholic cause.<sup>69</sup> Newdegate became Vice President of the Birmingham Loyal and Constitutional Association in 1843.<sup>70</sup>

The timing of Spooner's 1847 election address in Birmingham was significant being at the start of the Great Famine period when increasing numbers of poor Catholic Irish were beginning to settle in Birmingham, indeed so many were presenting themselves for relief at this time that the Poor Law Commissioners were forced to appoint one James Silcock and his wife as Superintendents of the Irish Paupers at the Mill premises in Weaman Street on joint wages of 30s a week.<sup>71</sup> This increase in numbers and burden upon rate payers was no doubt noted by the Birmingham populace and it is arguable that this issue presented an electoral opportunity to the flagging anti-free trade Conservatives<sup>72</sup> to exploit an anti-Irish/Catholic resentment. His campaign was successful and Spooner was duly elected MP for North Warwickshire and along with Charles Newdegate, they celebrated together at a public dinner in their honour in Birmingham Town Hall.<sup>73</sup>

In 1850 the Catholic Hierarchy was restored, stimulating many manifestations of anti-Catholicism in Britain. This was apparent in Birmingham where the "Papal Aggression" agitation was very strong. "The anti-Papists were very earnest and energetic and held a number of meetings in support of their views".<sup>74</sup> A town meeting was called by the Mayor for 11 December. Langford, writing in the early 1870s comments that:

"Previous to the meeting great efforts were made in the various pulpits of the town to arouse public feeling on the subject; meetings were held, lectures and addresses delivered, and a storm of indignation and religious intolerance raised not credible to the nineteenth century."<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Puritan descended Carr's Lane Congregationalist Chapel was singled out as the centre of this anti-Papist campaign. The meeting of 11 December was described by Langford as "One of the most extraordinary gatherings ever assembled in the Town Hall".<sup>76</sup> 10,000 persons congregated in the vicinity of the hall, the address was given in the presence of Spooner and others affirming loyalty to the Crown and Constitution, denouncing the papal bull and blaming "the existence in the Church of England of a certain number of the clergy, who's teaching and practice approximate to those of the Church of Rome."<sup>77</sup> The meeting lasted six hours and there was a "great excitement and atmosphere in the hall" and the show of hands were evenly split on the issue at hand. The extreme Protestants eventually lost the vote and there were recriminations and insults between attendees. Spooner refused to take the chair after the Mayor left. According to Langford this was "One of the most numerous and important meetings ever held in Birmingham". Indeed it was deemed important enough



to be recorded as a separate entry in Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham some 35 years later.<sup>78</sup>

The sectarian partnership between Newdegate and Spooner showed its dark side at the hustings in 1851 in the nearby town of Coleshill where a large band of Newdegate and Spooner supporters - wearing Orange colours - were involved in a violent confrontation that they later blamed upon the Catholic priesthood.<sup>79</sup> Spooner went on to write the anti-Catholic propaganda tract Maynooth Morals: The Real Teaching at Maynooth College in 1852.<sup>80</sup>

Leading politicians were not the only anti-Catholic actors resident in Birmingham at this time. In 1850 the Rev. J.C. Miller, incumbent of Saint Martin's Birmingham (situated adjacent to the Park and Allison Streets district) and Vice President of the Birmingham Protestant Association, gave a series of lectures around Birmingham (along with other clergy) that ran the through the whole sweep of prejudice and misrepresentation of the Catholic faith on the theme of "the encroachment of Romanism" and letters were written to newspapers, sermons and speeches were well attended.<sup>81</sup>

It is also around this time that the Birmingham Protestant Association began to organise anti-Catholic speakers to visit the town to give lectures on the dangers of the "Papal Creed". In 1851 the Birmingham Protestant Association invited the professional speaker, Italian nationalist and apostate priest Father Alessandro Gavazzi to deliver two orations in Birmingham. A large crowd of around 6,000 gathered at the town hall to hear his lecture upon "The Infamy of the Inquisition" on 20 October and on "The True Policy of England in Resisting the Papal Aggression" the following day.<sup>82</sup> He was

invited back the following year in November to give an oration entitled “Nunneries and the Confessional”,<sup>83</sup> and gave two more lectures between 16 and 17 December on “The Popish System, One of Invasion, Rebellion and Intolerance”, and “The Popish System, One of Blindness, Immorality and Slavery”.<sup>84</sup> He returned again on 10 March 1852 to lecture upon “The Papacy in England”.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore the connection between anti-Catholicism in Birmingham and politicians exploiting sectarian division for political gain as well as the role of the Birmingham Protestant Association instigation of public debate and lectures has a long and medium term root that bore yet more violent fruit in the late 1860s.

The manifestations of anti-Catholicism in Victorian Birmingham did not only concern the national issues of Catholic Revival but also more mundane day to day problems. In 1848, the same year as the abortive Young Ireland insurrection in Ireland, an event took place in London ‘Prentice Street Birmingham that fanned the fires of anti-Catholicism in the town but demonstrated the active part played by the Catholic clergy in resisting Protestant evangelical proselytisation among Roman Catholics. The event concerned the burning of a Bible in London Prentice Street on the 16th of November 1848 by a Roman Catholic priest. The Catholic family (their nationality is not noted) had evidently taken advantage of the Protestant Free Industrial School ran from Saint Philip's where the Bible had been obtained by their daughter. The pro-Protestant Aris's Birmingham Gazette, making covert reference to the taxpayers support of the Maynooth seminary, reported the event thus:



“A poor sick woman had a daughter who went to one of the Birmingham schools. From this school she had received a New Testament, from which she had been reading to her mother. The Priest, coming in and seeing it, tore it out of it's cover, thrust it into the fire and held it down with a stick until it was sufficiently consumed, remarking that he would so serve all such books he found in the houses when he visited. Were we then, after subscribing to the Bible Society and Christian Knowledge Society to supply the scriptures to the people, to be taxed for the maintenance of priests who burn them?”<sup>86</sup>

The event caused great consternation in the local clergy and this was discussed in the local and national press. Joshua Graves, incumbent of (the Anglican) Saint Peter's, stirred the murky waters by commenting that the priest in question, the Rev. W. Molloy, had said that he would “burn every Bible or tract he found in the houses of his people.” He went on:

“He also charged me never again to enter the house of a Romanist, in my district; and upon my assuring him that I should pay no attention to such a command, and the law of the land would protect my person, he said he would order his people to use “scurrilous” language towards me, and offer me insult if I ventured to pass their doors. Upon my appealing to him, and asking “how he dared to burn the word of God” he told me “to go and preach in my pulpit and not to him.”<sup>87</sup>



The Catholic clergy replied in the same journal (highlighting their own sensitivities to “leakage”) that:

“We, the Catholic clergy of Birmingham, having seen it stated in a letter from the Rev. Joshua Graves, that one of our body had burnt a copy of the Protestant version of the New Testament, found in the house of a Catholic have no hesitation at once of admitting the fact; but wish at the same time to add that the act was regretted afterwards by the clergyman...and strongly disapproved of by his brother clergy as soon as known. Justice, however, requires us to state that the Catholics of Birmingham have suffered constant and great annoyance from the interference of certain Protestant clergymen, or others, their agents, who frequently intrude themselves into the homes of poor Catholics, unsought for and uninvited, for the purpose of perverting their faith.”<sup>88</sup>

Graves replied in Aris's Birmingham Gazette that the comments were made to him by Father Molloy some days later and were therefore not said in haste or regretted, again repeating the allegations he set out in the Herald, as he did one further time some days later.<sup>89</sup>

The aforementioned Rev. J. C. Miller, Rector of Saint Martin's Church and Vice President of the Birmingham Protestant Association, published a sermon on the issue. He started by claiming that the purpose of choosing the Bible burning as the subject of

his sermon was not to “excite or fan the flame of bitter hostility against members of the Church of Rome.” He quotes Rev. Graves’s letters as well as the reply from the Catholic Priesthood and gives an example of a recent similar burning in Ireland. He then goes on to outline how his proselytising Scripture Readers go out amongst the poor Irish of Birmingham to read the Bible to them, most of them being illiterate. However, when his people began to instruct the same in basic literacy he alleged that the Catholic priests took the books from them. “The priest said their was no harm in the books themselves *but they would lead to the Bible.*” And what's more he was kicked by an Irishman as he left the court who “used the strongest language and exclaimed “*break his neck*””.<sup>90</sup> He later admitted that the purpose of their visits was to gain converts while inveighing against the Roman Catholic Church for doing the same.<sup>91</sup> The Rev.'s political agenda is foregrounded in this extract. He states:

“It will perhaps be said that in what I am now about to urge I am trenching on party politics. I appeal to my two year's ministrations in this town, whether I have at any time been guilty of advancing anything in the shape of party politics. But there are some questions in which politics and religion are so intimately blended, that I hold it to be false delicacy to abstain from the bold avowal of our sentiments....I will not consent to pay money for a priest who goes to London 'Prentice Street or into Ireland to burn the word of God.”<sup>92</sup>

The reference to paying money to priests is another allusion at the Maynooth grant. The Bible Burning issue was instrumental in generating publicity and support from the Birmingham Protestant Association which was already exploiting the Maynooth issue



to which this episode was linked in the Protestant clergy's public reactions. By the following year membership had doubled - perhaps also stimulated by the increased numbers of Catholic Irish migrants into Birmingham - and the second annual meeting was attended by 300 people and the library expanded threefold and religious political tracts had been distributed in their thousands.<sup>93</sup> The Association published its own monthly journal but by 1850 their membership was levelling off and the organisation was in relative decline although lectures continued to be well attended and the Association was involved in the "Papal Aggression" agitation.<sup>94</sup> The memory of the Bible burning lasted within the Protestant community up until the late 1860s at least when the Birmingham Protestant Association's periodical the Protestant Watchman took the credit for the Association in bringing this event to the public in Birmingham and nationally.<sup>95</sup>

It was not until the late 1860s that the Association began to revive. As already mentioned, a Church Extension Society was set up in 1865 to bring Protestant Christianity to the working class districts, some of the very places where the visible Catholic Irish were concentrated.<sup>96</sup> In 1866 the Birmingham Protestant Association held its 20th anniversary Tea Party at Saint Peter's School Rooms Dale End with the Rev. Whitehead in charge and T. H. Aston as honorary secretary. The organisation's library was held here and the report of the event announced that "For 20 years the Birmingham Protestant Association has laboured to disseminate information as to the importance of upholding and supporting the Protestant cause."<sup>97</sup> This not only included being vigilant against Catholicism in the town and nation but also organising anti-Mormon meetings.<sup>98</sup> The Association relied on donation and subscriptions for its survival and those who subscribed one shilling per quarter were entitled to free use of



the library and free admission to all lectures and meetings.<sup>99</sup> One issue that was prominent at the time was the right of Roman Catholics to be ministered by their own priest in gaols and workhouses. The Birmingham Protestant Association was active in the attempted prevention of this at nearby Stafford.<sup>100</sup> The Association was clearly still a militant organization agitating for political purposes and with an at times violent rhetoric. In the months leading up to the tumultuous events of the summer when they helped organise a visit by William Murphy to the town, the Birmingham Protestant Association Record noted in reply to criticism of their organisation's antagonistic stance that:

“Christianity is essentially of an aggressive character...we are never to overlook the Divine warning of the Lord “think not that I am come to send peace on Earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.””<sup>101</sup>

Some five months later, in the same month as the Murphy Riots, the Birmingham Protestant Association Record - displaying their penchant for exploiting anti-Catholicism for political gains - noted that:

“The Lectures of Mr. W. Murphy in Wolverhampton, Walsall, and other places in this neighbourhood have resulted in the formation of Branches of the Protestant Electoral Union of London. We trust they will progress, and be found useful at the present critical time. A branch of the Union has just been formed in Birmingham. May it have the support and aid of all true Protestants. There is room for many

such agencies in Birmingham, and we trust each and all may receive encouragement, sympathy and aid.”<sup>102</sup>

The links between the Birmingham Protestant Association, Orange Order and Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union of London were close as shall be demonstrated later. Another link was their use and instigation of anti-Catholic rhetoric, agitation and violence as a recruitment policy for these organisations and thereby the furtherance of their political agendas.

The Loyal Orange Institution or Orange Order can be described as a semi-secret organisation with social and political functions with similarities to freemasonry in its structural organisation. The Orange Order's ideology is a mixture of Lutheran and Calvinistic strains which dovetail with the preoccupations of evangelicalism in their notions of biblical authority and the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ as the sole religious mediator and the nineteenth century English clergy were significantly involved with the Order. Elaine McFarland points to the Orange Order's possession of an ideological tendency towards the liberating aspect of the Protestant faith in its notions of salvation, faith, the scriptures, an apostolic Church and the work ethic. The Orange Order has conceptions of their role in religious and temporal life that have broadly ecumenical tendencies and this resolves their anti-Catholicism into a conception of the system (rather than the individual Catholic) as evil. Thus they were essentially anti-popery rather than anti-papist although evidence on the ground tends to refute this assertion from the lower class activists' point of view. At least it can be argued that this assertion was probably understood only fully by the educated middle class activists. She also notes the Orange Order's political alliance with the Conservative party but points out



that this was a conditional support based upon the party's allegiance to the defence of the Protestant Constitution and Crown in Britain.<sup>103</sup> Indeed the Oath of Obligation given by all Orangemen since 1800 explicitly states the condition of loyalty to the Crown, "So long as he and they [George III and his successors] support the Protestant Ascendancy, the Constitution and laws of the Kingdoms".<sup>104</sup> Their first loyalty was and is to Protestantism as a faith and a political establishment. The idea of a conditional loyalty to the state is a major theme of Orange politics that has resonances through to the present.<sup>105</sup> The crude connection between Protestant ideology and the notion of rational instrumentalism in the Weberian sense is made plain by the conscientious requirements of an Orangeman as set out by the Order. An Orangeman's morality must include "a love of the rational and improving society, admire Protestantism and its precepts and promulgate them", and have "wisdom and prudence in action, temperance and sobriety, honesty and integrity in conduct",<sup>106</sup> all touchstones of Orange ideology if not practice.

The Order came into existence in Ireland in 1795 as the result of Protestant/Catholic antipathies that led to its foundation as a political organisation to defend Protestant interests as the original membership perceived them. Symbolically, the Orange Order *per se* was instigated after a violent confrontation between Catholics and Protestants at the Diamond in County Armagh that resulted in 48 dead and wounded Catholics. The Protestants were also symbolically attacked by the Catholic crowd, outnumbered and defending their territory in a small inn - and were victorious - all potent symbols of a lower class minority - as signified by patronage of an inn - under threat from the violent Catholic majority. There is throughout the Orange rhetoric a sense of a culture based upon a perceived victim status in Ireland, and this status as a triumphant



minority emphasises their difference and superiority from the Catholic Irish, a resonant nationalist ideological principle. The extension of this staunch resistance in minority can be seen in the most contentious of Orange Order traditions of parades and marching.<sup>107</sup> The expression of Orange identity through the ritual of parading is essential to Orange ideology as marching is a manifestation of an ideological, political, and physical agency of resistance to the Catholic "Other" - along with Jews, Anglo-Catholics and others - against which evangelical Protestants especially define themselves. The Orange Order's use of marching and political confrontation as a tool of boundary creation, maintenance and policing, can be seen as a real and symbolic "beating of the bounds" on a number of levels. The march is a territorialisation of hegemony in the emblematic sense of claiming physical, political, economic and ideological ascendancy within a geographical space - at once both physical and symbolically provocative or justificatory dependant on your political/religious allegiance. The most striking feature of this need to display is in its provocative articulation in speech and action. The compulsion to incite the "Other" to react is seemingly essential to the delineation of boundary formation of identity, foregrounding the role of violence, paranoia and pathology in speech and action, inherent within the victim ideology. At the same time, each successful provocation - as symbolised by a march, protest or otherwise - is a reinvention of victimhood triumphing in adversity and provides a strong symbolic, physical and spiritual link with the mythic past of their foundation parable. An ongoing re-invention of tradition to shore up a specific identity that - as it is defined by minority victimhood - is constantly in need of physical, spiritual, ideological and symbolic definition against the "Other" leading to reaffirmation of the Orange identity/boundary. Enloe's theory of religious closeness between ethnically divided groups leading to more importance ascribed to boundary

creation is visible here. The Orange Order needed to constantly reaffirm difference precisely because distinction between Irish Catholics and Protestants was so marginal and Protestantism was so under threat from the Catholic majority.

For Orange Order Lodges in England their outside nature is reinforced by their transplanting to the "mainland". They do not fit comfortably within the British liberal tradition ideologically or otherwise but their staunch defence of the Protestant constitution and ascendancy makes them a paragon of a certain type of Ultra Tory nationalism that is prevalent through to the present. The "parade" provides this annual reaffirmation of their identity, although where confrontation is inherent in the route chosen by marching through Catholic areas "demonstration" is probably a better description, but neither word captures the rich symbolism for both sides of these events.

The basic local unit of the Orange Order is the Lodge which is instigated via the issuing of a Warrant from officials of the Order. The first record of an Orange Warrant being carried to England from Ireland was on 23rd November 1798 when Colonel Stanley's Regiment of Lancashire Militia carried Warrant No. 220 to Manchester. These military Lodges soon transferred Orangeism to the civilian population and the growth of the Orange Order in northern England was rapid. However, Orangeism did not flourish where there was no large (actually or perceptually) Catholic Irish migrant population, again foregrounding the need for the Catholic "Other" to animate the victim/threat reaction as has already been noted.<sup>108</sup> In 1807 the County Grand Lodge of Lancashire was founded and the Grand Lodge of England was formed the following year. Subsequently Orange Order Lodges appeared in the rest of Britain but were



mainly concentrated in the Lancashire "cotton belt".<sup>109</sup> From its inception in Britain, the Orange Order came into violent confrontation with Irish Catholics. Without a large number of visible Catholics to inveigh against, the Order would have no meaning other than as a social and benevolent organisation of which there were many to choose from. It was the political aspect of the Orange Order and its staunch expression of a confrontational Protestant identity that made it attractive to a certain type of politicised Protestant. In Manchester during a parade in 1807 - immediately after its inception as an organisation in Britain - the Order was attacked by an Irish Catholic crowd and one of its leading members described the event as the British "battle of the Diamond", a symbolic violent foundation of Orangeism on the "mainland", a baptism of blood and a generator of publicity for their foundation and cause.<sup>110</sup> The Order was from the start prepared to demonstrate in the public sphere its existence and defend that right via violent or constitutional means.<sup>111</sup>

The use of the Orange card to mobilise the Protestant English working class (who would see the Irish fundamentally as an economic threat) behind certain - usually Conservative - political projects, was part of their political function and this inevitably impacted upon Irish Catholics and often resulted in physical clashes. Neal demonstrates the link between Orange Order organisation and ethnic violence against or from Irish Catholics in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow and he notes the connection between economic rivalry and the Orange Order's bigotry against the immigrant Irish.<sup>112</sup>

The Orange Order functioned in the early phase as a military based institution consisting of the lower orders and non-commissioned officers with growing civilian recruitment until the 1820s. Neal argues that there is no evidence of a central organised



link to further its political association with Tory policy. However, between 1821 and 1835 the Order was infiltrated and taken over by what Neal calls a “group of aristocratic extreme Protestants” who propelled the order into British politics at the highest level as a reaction to the Catholic question - the state attempted avoidance of violence in Ireland through concession to Catholics such as Emancipation without promoting an English Protestant backlash.<sup>113</sup> The crude attempts by these aristocrats to use the Orange Order as a political force created a backlash against the Order itself however, resulting in the temporary dissolution of the Order in 1835 after a ruinous Select Committee Report. MacRaild points to the slow growth of the Order through the first half of the century and how it became invigorated by the mass migration and “Papal Aggression” of the early 1850s and again in the late 1860s and 1870s in the face of Irish nationalism and Fenian agitation.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, it was during the late 1860s that the Orange Order in Birmingham, which had clear links with the Lodges in Liverpool as early as 1845<sup>115</sup>, received a boost in membership and began inaugurating new branches in the local area including Wolverhampton.<sup>116</sup>

Senior’s work supports Neal’s early non-political engagement thesis arguing that in its early phase the Orange Order in England was concerned with its social function as a friendly society rather than its political purpose, being populated by mainly Irish Protestants enlisted in English regiments and as a minority within a mainly Catholic minority that was treated with a broad contempt by the English. For Senior, these Protestants were encouraged to set themselves apart from the Catholic Irish and curry favour with the English through the common ties of religion and anti-Catholicism, thereby protecting their minority status from English antipathy. However, Senior does record that as early as 1812 Orange Order members were active in subversive

capacities against the Luddites as spies and infiltrators as well as being active in the overt coercive policing of the troubles, many signing on as special constables. The Order's members also played a minor part in the "Peterloo Massacre" of 1819. This at least demonstrates the Orange Order's political agency and allegiance to the establishment - as long as that was an upholder of the Protestant ascendancy.<sup>117</sup>

Neal also notes the social basis and attraction of the Orange Order to lower class Protestants and the chance it offered them to mix with the higher classes in the symbolic context of religious ritual and mystery that the Masonic ceremonial basis of the Orange Order's services provided. He also points to the focus the Orange Order provided for legitimating anti-Irish/Catholic bigotry. This had two aspects based on class perceptions. The middle class clergy and laity were concerned with the threat of Catholicism to the Protestant hegemony, the working class Orangeman was pre-occupied with economic competition provided by the introduction of the Irish migrant. Therefore middle class anti-Catholicism and working class anti-Irishness became co-joined within the Orange Order, giving anti-Catholicism that most important badge of Victorian social worth - respectability.<sup>118</sup> MacRaild also records the associational nature of the Order with its aspects of a friendly society and the recognition of a female presence within the organisation as well as a concern with the educational provision for children. MacRaild goes as far to characterise the initial function of the Order as a "kind of ex-servicemen's club and benefit society" providing opportunities for socialisation, social insurance and economic networking. He also notes the looser associations of a political nature that Orangeism as an ideology - as opposed to a society - engendered amongst the middle classes and Conservative politicians.<sup>119</sup>



In 1835, the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Origins, Nature and Extent of Orange Institutions in Great Britain and the Colonies noted (regarding the subversive political aspirations of the Orange Order as had been orchestrated by the aristocratic infiltration of the leadership in the early period in England that Neal refers to) the widespread nature of the Orange Order activities and that:

“Your committee are... of the opinion that the oral and documentary evidence that they have obtained.... is amply sufficient to prove the existence of an organised institution, pervading Britain and her colonies to an extent never contemplated as possible; and which your committee considers highly injurious to the discipline of Her Majesty's army, and dangerous to the peace of Her Majesty's subjects.”<sup>120</sup>

And went on to conclude that:

“The obvious tendency and effect of the Orange institution is to keep up an exclusive association in civil and military society, exciting one portion of the people against the other; to increase the rancour and animosity too often, unfortunately, existing between persons of different religious persuasions - to make the Protestant the enemy of the Catholic and the Catholic the enemy of the Protestant - by procession on particular days, attended with the insignia of the society, to excite the breaches of the peace on to bloodshed - to raise



up other secret societies among the Catholics in their own defence, against the insults of the Orangemen - to interrupt the course of justice; and to interfere with the discipline of the Army, thus rendering its services injurious instead of useful, when required on occasions when Catholic and Protestants may be parties... Your Committee finds that the Orange Lodges have a decidedly political character; and that almost all of their proceedings have had some political object in view.”<sup>121</sup>

Although the influence of the Orange Order is perhaps exaggerated, the political and subversive nature of the Orange Order is foregrounded in the report as is its willingness to use force to obtain its political objectives, especially during periods of national election to parliament. The links between the Orange Order and the Conservative Party are marked out as significant.<sup>122</sup>

“The Orange Lodges have interfered in various political subjects of the day, and made Orangemen a means of supporting the views of a political party, to maintain, as they avow, the Protestant ascendancy.”<sup>123</sup>

The report goes on to claim that the Orange Lodges have petitioned Royalty and influential individuals, have organised petitions and subscriptions in support of political ends, have interfered with the course of justice, including the prosecution of magistrates, and manipulated the press.<sup>124</sup> “They have also interfered with the elective

franchise, by expelling members of their body, as in Rochdale in 1835, for voting for the Liberal candidate."<sup>125</sup>

The report also notes that membership of the Orange Order had advantages. Patronage was one attractive aspect of membership - as noted by Neal and MacRaild - as influential members could be lobbied for by other members for privileged treatment in applications for licences for Public Houses, military pensions, employment in the Police and other work. Indeed this aspect of membership became so prevalent that it began to become a nuisance and Lodge members had to be reminded that patronage was not the point of Orange Order membership in 1833.<sup>126</sup>

The report examined the extent of the Orange Order in the empire and there is some information regarding their early activities in Birmingham. Senior Orange Order member Lieutenant Colonel Fairman did something of a Grand Tour of the Lodges of England in the 1830s and visited Birmingham. When asked how many Lodges there were in Birmingham he replied, using a less than co-operative idiom, "I believe we have only three". He admitted that he assembled all of them on his visit and in reply to a question on their numbers replied, "Not very strong; I think I might have had a meeting of perhaps thirty, but the whole number of each Lodge did not attend; I summoned only the Masters and the Officers".<sup>127</sup> As the numbers of Irish Catholics in Birmingham was small at this time it is probable that this influenced Orange Order membership. With so few to agitate against, the Catholic threat to the Protestant Ascendancy in Birmingham was negligible.



The political purity of the members was important as some members of the Birmingham Orange Order Lodge, Warrant number 60, were, expelled for attending a meeting of the Birmingham Political Union in the 1830s as they had "not sufficiently testified their regret and contrition for such un-Orange and improper conduct" demonstrating the political obligations of membership of the Orange Order.<sup>128</sup> There seems to be little other evidence of their activities until the 1860s. However, the Birmingham Protestant Association was active in the intervening years and a definite link between the two organisations can be made in the late 1860s at least.

By 1867 the Birmingham Protestant Association and Birmingham Orange Order Albert Lodge shared membership and leadership. At a preliminary meeting held at Saint Peter's School Rooms Dale End in May 1864 it was decided by those gathered that "A Lodge be formed in Birmingham in connection with the Loyal Orange Institution of Great Britain".<sup>129</sup> From the beginning the renewed Birmingham Lodge had close links with the Orange Order in Liverpool sending delegations to the Lodges there and keeping in touch in regard to the opening of new Lodges in Birmingham.<sup>130</sup> On the 4 June 1864, the Birmingham officers were elected in the presence of a deputation of Brothers from the Grand Lodge of the Liverpool Orange Order, including one Brother Hargreaves who was then the current editor of an Orange Order newspaper the Liverpool Herald.<sup>131</sup> The expenses of the deputation from Liverpool were paid by the Lodge.<sup>132</sup> Attendance by Birmingham Orange Order members of the Liverpool Lodge was supported by the Birmingham Lodge also.<sup>133</sup> The first Worshipful Master was one J. H. Stuart, the Grand Master was Thomas. H. Aston and the Rev. D. G. Whitehead - all active Birmingham Protestant Association members. Whitehead was elected Lodge Chaplain and led the prayers that began each meeting. Humphrey Pautney became



Secretary and Treasurer and one J. M. Brindley was elected 1st. Committee Man. The decision was made to meet on the second Tuesday of the month at Saint Peter's Church rooms with an annual meeting held at the Woolpack Hotel in the Irish district of Moor Street on or around the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne on the 12th of July. The new Lodge, No. 1235, celebrated its instigation at the Woolpack Hotel the same evening.<sup>134</sup>

"A sumptuous supper was served up to celebrate the event. After justice had been done to the good things provided, the Rev. G. Whitehead, DGC, took the chair. The usual loyal toasts having been given, Mr. G. H. Jones of Liverpool Grand Lodge proposed the pious, glorious and immortal memory of William III Prince of Orange, which was drunk in solemn silence....The meeting, which proved really pleasant and highly gratifying one to all present, was brought to a close by the National Anthem".<sup>135</sup>

Understanding the membership of Orange Order Lodges in this period is an area of new research with little published detail. Donald MacRaild's work on the Order in North East England points to the small size of the typical Lodge. The membership was usually between 20 to 30 individuals, more than 30 being rare and 20 typical. However, many were in single figures and there was a high turnover of members.<sup>136</sup> Between the inception of the new Birmingham Lodge in 1864 and March 1868 the Lodge had 183 individual members mentioned in its minute book, being in the main the names of new members accepted, transferred or readmitted. The Lodge started off small in line with the normal membership size, but thereafter grew rapidly. Thirty members were present

at the annual supper in July 1865 and certainly the Lodge had less than 50 members in September 1866.<sup>137</sup> In 1865 21 new members were recorded, 38 in 1866 and a massive 108 in 1867. The numbers joining the Lodge began to increase significantly after November 1866, 38 joining between this date and June 7th 1867.<sup>138</sup> New members greatly increased after the Murphy riots in July 1867. An extra 10 members were admitted in the meeting following the disturbances on 5 July, another 14 at a special meeting on 2 August, 38 in September and another 21 between then and January 1868. In all a total of 83 new recruits in the 6 months following the Murphy disturbances and 128 since November 1866.<sup>139</sup>

The Lodge was obviously undergoing a significant period of growth in 1867 and began to open new branches in Birmingham. Certainly by 1865 the Lodge was important enough within Britain to call an extraordinary meeting and to summon Lodge members to discuss the propriety of the Lodge taking "The Purple Order", a recognition of their growing status.<sup>140</sup> A recruitment drive had begun in May 1866 and had started to return results by November of that year.<sup>141</sup> The Lodge had to move to new premises in Lesley Street Chapel in September 1867, and also met at the Packhorse Moor Street presumably to cope with this expansion or perhaps to conceal their meetings in the light of the recent Murphy riots in Birmingham.<sup>142</sup> Members also began to transfer from other Lodges at this time, including the Dublin Lodge No. 1234,<sup>143</sup> London Lodge No. 221 and Wolverhampton Lodge No. 55.<sup>144</sup> Membership was not always accepted, two members being expelled only moments after being proposed and approved allegedly due to them "not possessing dedicated Christian principles" and being involved in "improper conduct" in a letter read out at the meeting.<sup>145</sup> The Lodge also came under investigation in early 1868 for members divulging passwords and signs in the Catholic publications



The Universal News and The Universe.<sup>146</sup> These problems could indicate, along with two resignations over disagreements with newly elected Worshipful Master Brother Robb, close to the appearance of William Murphy in Birmingham, tensions within the Lodge over policy and indeed possible infiltration by pro-Catholic elements.<sup>147</sup> Other signs of the expansion of the Order at this time can be shown by the number of new Lodges instigated in the area as well as the problems of some others that were finding it difficult to function alone. A deputation from local Lodge No. 200 of Bath Street visited the Albert Lodge in October 1866 to discuss a merger.<sup>148</sup> There is also a mention of the Kidderminster Lodge being included in social activities at this time.<sup>149</sup> MacRaid refers to the Order's preoccupation with policing its members in religious matters but was tolerant up to a point of financial irregularities in the accounts of Lodges.<sup>150</sup> This is reflected in Birmingham as there is a reference to Lodge No. 1236 's business being "loose" and investigations being started by Albert Lodge. A new Birmingham Lodge was established in November 1867 and a Handsworth branch was proposed in December of that year (Lodge No. 1238), inaugurated in January 1868 when another Lodge was proposed for Duddeston. By this time there was a proposal to elect a District Lodge of all members of the high ranking Purple Order in Birmingham demonstrating the rapid expansion of the Order in Birmingham after the Murphy riots and the need for an overarching co-ordinating body.<sup>151</sup> Also at this time the Birmingham Lodge was instrumental in the support for existing Lodges and the setting up of new ones in Wolverhampton, also a site of riots in 1867 related to the lectures of William Murphy; the two events were not unconnected. On the meeting of 25 October 1864, just three months after the inauguration of the Birmingham Lodge, its minutes record that "The Worshipful Master, and Deputy Master expressed their intentions to visit Wolverhampton on Friday next to meet Brother Davis from London to initiate



Purple Members in that town.”<sup>152</sup> Eighteen months later the minutes record the expenses of a deputation consisting of Brothers Whitehead, Hill, Stuart and one other to form a new Lodge in Wolverhampton. The following month it was proposed “That each member of this Lodge attend as a deputation at the opening of the new Lodge in Wolverhampton.” Ten prominent Birmingham members attended this inauguration on 15 May 1866.<sup>153</sup> Significantly, Brothers Stuart and Scott received 4s 6d each to attend the re-establishment of another Lodge in Wolverhampton in June 1867, three months after the Murphy agitations in that town. It seems that membership of the Orange Order in Wolverhampton was increasing to such an extent that - as in Birmingham - new Lodges were needed.<sup>154</sup>

The members of the Lodge paid regular subscriptions to the running costs of the organisation in Birmingham. Subscriptions were paid in quarterly instalments in June, September, December and March.<sup>155</sup> The subscription was 6d per month in 1865 but was not enough to cover the expenses the Lodge, and a proposal was drawn up to increase it to 1s. “It was resolved that a special effort be made on next Lodge night to raise a sufficient sum to clear off the debt, as shown by the balance sheet of the past year”.<sup>156</sup> Exactly a year later the subscription was raised to 1s. 6d. per month, 6d. to the Lodge and 1s. to a Christmas fund.<sup>157</sup> This was later reduced back to 1s. in March 1867.<sup>158</sup> The Lodges finances were handled by the “auditors of the balance sheet” Brothers (in both senses) Joseph and W. A. Jones.<sup>159</sup>

The social functions of one of the Orange Order Lodges in Birmingham during the late 1860s covered a number of areas. Those attending the regular monthly meetings of Albert Lodge during this time were provided with refreshments paid out of Lodge

funds and the Lodge held regular annual suppers for its members in Birmingham at the Woolpack Hotel Moor Street and would also meet in places such as Aston Park to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne.<sup>160</sup> The following year the annual Woolpack supper was accompanied by speeches, the singing of sectarian songs and poetry readings.<sup>161</sup> The Rev. Whitehead gave a speech during which he referred to the progress that had been made in the 12 months of the Lodge's existence. He defined Orangeism as:

“...active Protestantism as opposed to Popery and Puseyism - a Protestant political organisation calculated to meet the political conspiracy or as it was termed “The Church” of Rome - had made in Birmingham in the past 12 months.”<sup>162</sup>

The Rev. Whitehead was pointing to the genesis of the Orange Order in Birmingham in the negative terms of opposition, foregrounding the political *raison d'être* of the Order vis à vis the Catholic revival - particularly recent developments - and the need to oppose this revival as well as the fact that there would be no need to defend Protestantism in the area if it was not for Catholics in the town and region. Also at this time local anxiety and pressure towards Anglo-Catholicism was rising. Although there were many instances of the local Anglican clergy adopting “Ritualist” practices, chief among them was Rev. R. W. Euraght of the parish of the Holy Trinity in Bordesley. Under his ministry the parish became a centre for Anglo-Catholicism in the 1860s coming under sustained press attack and public discussion.<sup>163</sup> Along with this was the intellectual and spiritual leadership that was given to Anglicans and Catholics at home and abroad by the writings, speeches and teachings of John Henry Newman and others



in Birmingham, making the area a centre of Catholic revival and of course therefore a threat to the Protestant hegemony.

Other Orange Order social functions at the Woolpack included celebrations centred upon the anniversaries of the Battle of the Boyne, The Gunpowder Plot and William III's Birthday as well as the new year.<sup>164</sup> However, these celebrations did not always go congenially. MacRaild points out that frequent falling outs and arguments between brethren were a feature of the Lodges in England, and Birmingham was no exception.<sup>165</sup> Brothers Jones and Roberts resigned from the Lodge at a special meeting called in 1867 due to "Certain expansions at the anniversary meeting on 12 July at the Woolpack Hotel against Brother Robb".<sup>166</sup> What these expansions were is unknown, but one could speculate that they were possibly connected to the forthcoming lectures of William Murphy in which the Orange Order were intrinsically involved, eventually resulting in much damage to the town. Certainly when Murphy addressed the Lodge at a meeting soon after the riots, he was met with a mixture of adulation and scorn by Lodge members.<sup>167</sup> Brother Robb seems to have been a controversial figure in the past having been appointed Treasurer and Secretary in 1864 he resigned and withdrew from the Lodge in October 1865 but had returned and become Worshipful Master of the Lodge in May 1867 just before the falling out and during a crucial time in the Lodge's support for Murphy. However, this is pure speculation and the falling out of such a senior member could have been over anything.<sup>168</sup>

Other social functions of the Lodge included at least the planning of excursions to places of interest outside of Birmingham, one prominent Orange Order member - George Whalley MP - offering his mansion in north Wales for such an event.<sup>169</sup> Other



prominent local members were presented with gifts on their retirement from office. Brother Humphrey Pautney, the original Lodge Secretary and Treasurer, was presented with a posthumous medal from the Lodge in 1864 and "Five Brothers" attended his funeral "with their regalia, accompanied by five members of the committee of the Birmingham Protestant Association".<sup>170</sup> The aforementioned Rev. D. G. Whitehead - a former chaplain to the Lodge - was presented with a small silver communion service as well as a small walking stick with an engraved handle<sup>171</sup> and the original Grand Master of the Lodge, T. H. Aston, was also presented with a Bible and prayer book on his birthday. A jewel was approved by the Lodge to be presented to a past Grand Master, possibly George Jackson, in 1865.<sup>172</sup> The organisation of a benefit society for the Lodge was delayed in Birmingham due to a lack of membership. Brother Henry Ward argued that the benefit society should wait until the Lodge reached 50 members.<sup>173</sup> This had occurred by March 1867 when a Brother Hargreaves was given 10s "for illness", an amount that was repeated in May and November of that year, and was continued in 1868, 40s being distributed in weekly amounts of 5s.<sup>174</sup> The Birmingham Lodge also helped its members with funeral costs, Rev. Whitehead receiving £1.00 from the Lodge for the expenses of him attending (and presumably for such a sum ministering to) Lodge member Brother Hill's funeral in 1867.<sup>175</sup> There also seems to have been some sort of Christmas fund.<sup>176</sup> Other expenses incurred by the Lodge included the rent of meeting rooms, refreshments for the meetings, purchase of campaign materials and literature pertaining to Orangeism, travel expenses for Lodge members from and visiting other Lodges in Liverpool and Wolverhampton, support for campaigns pursued by other Lodges as well as sundry items such as the purchase of a "large wooden box" to hold the Warrant of the Lodge.<sup>177</sup>

As Rev. Whitehead had pointed out in his speech a year after the Orange Order's re-establishment in Birmingham, the main role of the Order was a political campaign to counter Catholicism in the region and money and resources were acquired by the Order towards this purpose. The issues that were prevalent at the time were the repeal of the Maynooth endowment and the inspection of convents. Keeping in touch with the movement's agenda was of course important and on 11 January 1865 the Lodge "Resolved that six copies of the Orange and Protestant banner be ordered from Brothers Squire and Cluty monthly."<sup>178</sup> In May 1866, six months before new members began to increase significantly, it was proposed at the Lodge that:

"1,000 copies each of Dr. Drew's "Twenty Reasons For Being An Orangeman" and "What Is The True Meaning Of Orangeism" be printed by Brother Smith and be distributed by the brethren to increase the number of the institution."<sup>179</sup>

This demonstrated that the Lodge had access to publishing resources and an intention to expand its membership and influence. This was also precisely at the time that the Birmingham Lodge was presiding over the expansion of Orangeism in Wolverhampton.

Some six months later the Order began to flex its political muscles in regard to the aforementioned Charles Newdigate Newdegate, of Arbury Hall near Nuneaton in Warwickshire. Newdegate was descended from a former Cromwellian Chief Justice and the second Baronet Richard Newdigate was the man who introduced the gunmaking industry into Warwickshire. The family had interests in the coal and transport industries. Charles inherited the early Gothic mansion that is still the family home and



first became a Conservative MP for North Warwickshire in 1843. Newdegate was a close acquaintance and political ally of leading Birmingham Conservative Richard Spooner whose connection to and exploitation of anti-Catholicism for political ends has already been discussed. Newdegate was also of course staunchly supportive of Protestantism and the Protestant constitution. He voted against the Peel Government in 1845 over the issue of the Maynooth Grant, mindful of government support for training Roman Catholics to spread religious education in establishments such as Oscott College in Birmingham.<sup>180</sup> The Orange Order's support for Mr. Newdegate's re-election to parliament in the forthcoming general election of 1867 - significantly at a time when the Second Reform Bill was extending the franchise to nearly one million new voters - was also stimulated by the opposition of Birmingham Roman Catholic Bishop Ullathorne to Newdegate that had begun in 1865. The Bishop had publicly challenged the MP to visit a number of Catholic establishments under his jurisdiction to repudiate certain scandalous allegations made by the MP. These allegations were part of a long running campaign against nunneries and the Birmingham Oratory, alleging licentious behaviour and the holding of "prisoners" in specially built dungeons. The MP's bluff was called and Ullathorne publicly berated him for being unable to gather enough evidence to obtain a sought after search warrant "And at the same time you refuse the free offer of inquiry without the necessity of a warrant."<sup>181</sup> The Orange Order minutes in October 1866 refer to the campaign of Ullathorne against Newdegate. The Lodge received:

"A deputation of the following named brethren from the Association Lodge number 200 of Orangemen....to consider the propriety of uniting with us or as to counteract if possible a "Dirty Conspiracy" on



the part of the Popish Bishop Ullathorne to oppose one of our great Protestant champions Mr. C. Newdegate's return to parliament.”<sup>182</sup>

The issue was fully discussed by the Lodge with Brother Stewart taking a active part, underlining the political ties and activism of the Lodge when in defence of militant Protestant causes. This was just 5 months before William Murphy was invited to Wolverhampton and then Birmingham.

Another major figure in the anti-Catholic agitations of this period on a national and local level was one George Whalley MP, a colleague of Richard Spooner and Charles Newdegate. Whalley represented Peterborough as an MP between 1852 and 1874 with one short break. He was the eldest son of banker James Whalley of Gloucester and was descended from Edmund Whalley, cousin of Oliver Cromwell, and one of the members of the High Court of Justice that tried Charles I in 1649 and a co-signatory of the warrant that condemned the King to death, a fact which Whalley was fond of reminding people of. He was educated at University College London and gained a 1st in Rhetoric and Logic before being called to the Bar in 1839. A veteran of the Crimea, he was a Justice of the Peace in Denbigshire, Montgomeryshire and Merionethshire and became High Sheriff of Carnarvonshire in 1853. He had a house and estate in Llangollen and established fisheries in the West of Ireland during the Great Famine period. He was a great supporter of “The Tichbourn claimant” and showed media skills in the use of the press and public controversy to further his opinions. The issue created much sensation at the time and raised Whalley's profile nationally. He was a Liberal who described himself as “strongly Protestant and in favour of free trade in all things, including

religion and education.”<sup>183</sup> A less than flattering obituary in the Illustrated London News commented that his:

“usefulness in the legislature was much impaired by a singular want of tact, and the sense of due proportion and plausible likelihood, in his pertinacious advocacy of views not conducive to the harmonious progress of business.”<sup>184</sup>

The obituary goes on to praise his intelligence and good nature and concludes that:

“He was, in short, a good man and a clever man, with an imperfect faculty of critical perception, and with a sanguine rashness of temperament, which too often led him into eccentric mistakes.”<sup>185</sup>

Whalley had been an enthusiastic supporter of Newdegate's anti-Catholic campaigns since 1859 and was the author of (under the pseudonym of Patrick Murphy) a fictional anti-Catholic tract entitled Popery in Ireland; or, Confessionals, Abductions, Nunneries, Fenians and Orangemen: A Narrative of Facts, published in 1865.<sup>186</sup> Whalley eventually fell out with Newdegate in 1869 who accused him of turning the campaign over Maynooth into a laughing-stock (as the tone of the Vanity Fair and Illustrated London News articles attest) and accused him of being a Jesuit in disguise.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, Wolffe argues that one of the main reasons for the decline of anti-Catholicism in the middle of the century was its declining political credibility, along with a fragmented leadership.<sup>188</sup>



Whalley was also a prominent member of the aforementioned Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union (PEMEU), that sponsored William Murphy's lectures around the country and gave him an aura of middle class respectability but crucially at a time of parliamentary reform, a working class audience. According to a letter from George Nixon, Mayor of Birmingham, to the Home Secretary in June 1867, the Union's senior members were Whalley, secretary Robert Steele, president Lt. Col. H. J. Brockman and Rev. J. E. Armstrong Rector of Burslem. Their methods "To maintain the Protestantism of the Bible and the LIBERTY OF Britain" relied on publishing inflammatory pamphlets, leaflets, placards and tracts at affordable prices, the organisation of lectures sermons and public meetings and to agitate for and support organisationally any parliamentary or judicial investigations into Roman Catholic organisations and their members as well as actively soliciting for donations to this cause.<sup>189</sup> The union was a tiny group but had the MP George Whalley's talents as a member and mouthpiece and came to affect public opinion in Victorian society greatly, its influence belying its size. The PEMEU was an organisation that typified a certain strain of extreme Protestantism, and Ultra Tory unionism. They were essentially a rabid anti-Catholic political movement with a political agenda concerned with opposing any concession to the Roman Catholic Church in Britain, and they represented a breed of bigoted, inflammatory Orange/Ultra Toryism where ideological constructions of Church, State and Nation become inexorably fused, with a threat to any part endangering the whole edifice of the Protestant ascendancy. In this they shared many traits with the Orange Order, and indeed were probably an extreme splinter group.<sup>190</sup> The Union was a reflection of the tensions within the Protestant anti-Catholic movement being a purely political organisation as opposed to a religious and social one.<sup>191</sup> Arnstein notes that the union claimed to have produced and sold millions of tracts and leaflets as well as organising 350 lectures and 150



sermons in 1869 alone.<sup>192</sup> The most notorious tract published by the PEMEU - as mentioned in the Vanity Fair article - was The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the Depravity of the Romish Priesthood and the Inquiry of the Confessional and the Questions Put to Females in Confession, a semi-pornographic portrayal of Roman Catholic practices first published in 1836. The pamphlet - which is intimately co-joined with the activities of William Murphy - did not receive wide distribution until the PEMEU first printed 25,000 copies in 1865 and another 15,000 in 1867.<sup>193</sup> The motive for publishing the tract is given in an advert for its merits produced in 1865.

“The increased malice and wrath of the priesthood convince us of the necessity of giving to the people the means of learning the perilous condition the policy of the government has placed them in, that they might prepare for the conflict which self preservation now necessitates. The necessity becomes more pressing from the fact that the Jesuit influence is now so largely exercised over the bench, the pulpit and the press.”<sup>194</sup>

Whalley held a copy of the pamphlet in his hands as he addressed Parliament in 1865 in support of Newdegate's demands for nunneries to be investigated.

“People may take the law into their own hands [in regard to Roman Catholic nunneries] and inflict summary justice on these mysterious strongholds of repulsive and dangerous doctrines. I trust this may be averted, but there is a danger of a different kind of which I warn the House. I hold in my hand a pamphlet consisting of authentic extracts

from the authorised text books of Romanism, than which nothing more foul in language, more debasing in morals, more revolting to every honest and virtuous mind was ever committed to print, the object being to bring into such subjection the minds and feelings of female penitents, that they may ensure their services for what ever objects the Church or the priesthood may deem fit...It is to be wondered that the Romanists trained in these doctrines by an alien priesthood should become Fenians, or that they should practice assassination and rebellion in accordance with the principles in which they are educated under the patronage of our government.”<sup>195</sup>

Whalley here touches on all the great themes of anti-Catholicism in this period, instigators of low morality and base depravity, threats to liberty and the state, dangerous alien ideas, threatening educational doctrines, governmental support for the same and perhaps most importantly the assumption that Catholic means Irish and Irish revolutionary nationalism. The language in the first part of the quote signposts the violent tactics of the Union and its supporters that were to come, with the insincere liberal caveat that he hoped it would not come to this. The notion of Catholics in Britain as revolutionary Irish is reinforced in another pamphlet published by the Union written by its secretary Robert Steele in 1869 entitled No Priest, No Fenian. Steele accuses the Roman Catholic clergy of raising funds for arms under the pretence of church building funds. To Steele, Catholic, Irish and Fenian were one and the same.<sup>196</sup>

That Whalley was closely linked to the Orange Order in Birmingham is certain. He wrote to the Lodge in September 1867 and offered to take them on an “excursion to his



mansion in North Wales along with wife family and friends” an offer that was withdrawn due to his wife's ill health a month later.<sup>197</sup> As prominent active anti-Catholics and colleagues Whalley and local MPs Spooner and Newdegate were known and supported by the Orange Order in Birmingham, but it is probably Whalley's links with William Murphy and the lectures a few months before that brought him closer to the Lodge at this time. He was obviously an Orange Order member as he is referred to as Brother Whalley and comments in the letter informing the Lodge of his wife's ill health that “It is very gratifying to witness the spirit that is awaking amongst the Orange Brotherhood in all parts - of which I almost daily receive some evidence...”.<sup>198</sup> The “spirit” he refers to is presumably that of the willingness to fight and confront the opponents of the Protestant ascendancy in the land as will be explored in the next chapter.

To conclude, the Orange Order in Britain can be characterised as an essentially lower middle and working class organisation with military associations as well as economic, social and charitable functions conjoined to a staunch defence of the Protestant constitution and Crown. The Orange Order, symbolically founded in violence and victimhood, demonstrated an overt political instrumentalism to their activities such as support for the Conservative party and the status quo. It was not adverse to employing subversive activities to further its interests as well as demonstrating provocative tendencies in its activities such as parading and sponsorship of anti-Catholic organisations and their adjutants in order to define itself more clearly against its Catholic Irish antithesis. This necessitated the construction and constant policing of the ethnic boundary as realised most visibly through parades and anti-Catholic activity. There was also an organised extreme faction of the anti-Catholicism movement that



was engaged in propagandist and confrontational tactics to oppose the British Catholic Revival consisting of some high profile establishment figures closely linked to anti-Catholic campaigns locally and nationally. Individuals such as Charles Newdegate, George Whalley and Richard Spooner were all MPs that had close links with Birmingham politicians and religious organisations such as the Orange Order and Birmingham Protestant Association that had also been campaigning against Catholicism since the early part of the century. These links would be utilised for political purposes during the events in Birmingham of 1867 that became known as the Murphy riots.

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<sup>1</sup> The Nation, 28 June 1856.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Best notes that Catholic Emancipation united Protestants in England at the perceived "loss" of Ireland and furthermore, "...now that Protestant Ascendancy was no longer constitutionally guaranteed over there [Ireland], it became necessary for keen Protestants - and politically profitable for keen Tories - to keep the fires of the true faith well stoked beneath a widening range of political public. Best, G. F. A., "Popular Protestantism in Victorian England" in Robson, R., (ed.), Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1967, p.139.

<sup>3</sup> Hickman, 1995, op. cit., pp.29-31.

<sup>4</sup> Fielding, op. cit., p.6.

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<sup>5</sup> Colley, op. cit., pp.4-12.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p.73.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, op. cit., p.156.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.168.

<sup>9</sup> Moody, T. W., and Martin, F. X., (eds.), The Course of Irish History, The Mercier Press, Cork, 1984, p.228; Foster, R. F., Modern Ireland 1600-1972, Penguin Books, London, 1989, pp.222-3.

<sup>10</sup> Arnstein, op. cit., 1982, pp.1-9.

<sup>11</sup> Paz, D. G., Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid Victorian England, Stanford University Press, Stanford California, 1992, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Arnstein, Walter L., "Victorian Prejudice Re-examined", Victorian Studies, Vol. 12, June 1969, pp.452-3; Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp.1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Norman, E. R., Anti Catholicism in Victorian England, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1968, pp.14-22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp. 62-73; Paz, op. cit., p.189.

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<sup>15</sup> Paz, Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>18</sup> The Tractarian movement began about 1833 and “ended” in 1845 when John Henry Newman finally converted to Roman Catholicism. Tractarianism was also known as the Oxford Movement as Newman was a fellow of Oriel College Oxford and vicar of Saint Mary's, the University Church, and other advocates were based there. During the 1830s Oxford was seen as being religiously and politically conservative, identifying strongly with the Church of England, unlike the more liberal Cambridge. Birmingham played an important part in the movement as Oxford was part of the diocese. Norman, op. cit., pp.105-122; Paz, op. cit., pp.131-4; The Concise Dictionary of National Biography, op. cit., p.2171; Gill, op. cit., pp.375-6.

<sup>19</sup> Paz, op. cit., pp.141-147.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.133.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp.151-2.

<sup>22</sup> Norman, op. cit., pp.61-78; Paz, op. cit., p.1.



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<sup>23</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp.3-4; Best, op. cit., pp.118-23.

<sup>24</sup> Best, Ibid; Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.4; Norman, op. cit., pp.15-16; Paz, op. cit., p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Paz, ibid, pp.2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Norman, op. cit., pp.18-19.

<sup>27</sup> Newsinger, op. cit., pp.54-5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp.57-9.

<sup>29</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.406.

<sup>30</sup> Weinburger, B., "The Police and the Public in Mid Nineteenth Century Warwickshire", in Bailey V, (ed.) Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain, Croom Helm, London 1981, pp.68-9.

<sup>31</sup> MacRaild, 1999, op. cit., p.140.

<sup>32</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.260.

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<sup>33</sup> Moran, G., "Nationalists in Exile: the National Brotherhood of Saint Patrick in Lancashire 1861-5", in Swift and Gilley, 1999, op. cit., p.214.

<sup>34</sup> Denvir, op. cit., pp.260-1.

<sup>35</sup> Moody, T. W., Davitt and the Irish Revolution 1846-82, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981, p.68.

<sup>36</sup> Accounts of the arrest and trial can be found in The Nation, 21, 28 May 1870, 4 June 1870.

<sup>37</sup> Hart, C. J., The History of the 1st Volunteer Battalion, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and its Predecessors: The Birmingham Independent Volunteers, 1782; The Birmingham Loyal Association, 1797, The Loyal Birmingham Volunteers, 1803, Midland Counties Herald, Birmingham, 1906, pp.139-142.

<sup>38</sup> Showell, op. cit., p.74.

<sup>39</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.73.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.128.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.116; Showell, op. cit., p.244.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp.143-8.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp.257-61.

<sup>44</sup> See Williams, op. cit., p.3; Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>45</sup> B.R.L., 273589, Birmingham Scrapbook Vol. 3, Brownlow, J. T., Catholics.  
Abstract of a Letter to --- ---, Harvington Hall, 11 March 1825.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Wolff, op. cit., pp.46-7.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid; Greaney, op. cit., p.26

<sup>48</sup> Judith F. Champ, "Priesthood and Politics in the Nineteenth Century: The Turbulent Career of Thomas McDonnell" Recusant History, Vol.18, 1987, pp.289-303.

<sup>49</sup> Denvir, op. cit., p.259; Butler, C., The Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne : 1806-1889, London, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1926, p.142.

<sup>50</sup> B.R.L., 89084 G. Handbill, J. Belcher and Son, High Street Birmingham, 26 February, 1829.

<sup>51</sup> B.R.L., Birmingham Scrap Book, Vol. 3, 273589, Handbill scrap, "Friends and Fellow Townsmen" no date, approximately 1829.



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<sup>52</sup> B.C.A, CC1/72, Mr. Clay's Journal for the Town Mission in Association with the Church Assembling in Carr's Lane, 27 February 1837. See also 20 June 1838, 5 August 1838, 10 October 1838, 8 February 1839, 20 August 1839, 23 October 1839, 13-16 April 1840, 19 June 1840.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 15 October 1838.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 16 April 1840.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 21 October 1839, 29 March 1839.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 5 August 1838.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 19 June 1840.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Wolffe, J., The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p.118.

<sup>59</sup> Briggs, 1953, op. cit., p.3; Mole, op. cit., pp.820-30.

<sup>60</sup> Mole, op. cit., pp.120-24.

<sup>61</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.48.

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<sup>62</sup> Wolffe, op. cit., pp.157-8; B.R.L., L.17.09, Birmingham Protestant Association Record, No.2, November 1866, p.1

<sup>63</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.62.

<sup>64</sup> Skipp, op. cit., p.25. Notorious anti-Catholic and friend of Spooner Charles Newdegate was returned for the first time as MP for North Warwickshire in the same election. Showell, op. cit., p.202.

<sup>65</sup> Gill, op. cit., p.218.

<sup>66</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.96.

<sup>67</sup> B.R.L., Scrapbook No. 3, 273589, "To the Protestant Electors of Birmingham", Handbill, Birmingham, 1847.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid; Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.34.

<sup>69</sup> Arnstein, Ibid, pp.18, 34; Paz, op. cit., pp.15-17.

<sup>70</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.90.

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<sup>71</sup> Along with an allowance for lodging, coal and candles. B.C.A., GP/B/2/1/5, Minute Book of the Birmingham Poor Law Guardians for the Parish of Birmingham, 1 June, 1847.

<sup>72</sup> The sitting MP William Dugdale preferred retirement than face defeat, Spooner was nominated in his place. Arnstein, 1982, op. cit, p.22.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>74</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.108.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.109.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.110.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.112; Showell, op. cit., p.7.

<sup>79</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp. 31-2.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.56.

<sup>81</sup> Kiernan, op. cit., p.40.



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<sup>82</sup> Langford, op. cit., p.401.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.407.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.411.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid p.421.

<sup>86</sup> "Report of the Meeting of the Birmingham Protestant Association; Bible Burning in Park Street", Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 27 November 1848.

<sup>87</sup> Joshua Graves, Letter to the Editor, Midland Counties Herald, 29 November 1848; Joshua Graves, Letter to the Editor, Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 18 December 1848.

<sup>88</sup> Bernard Ivers, Thomas M. Leith, William Molloy of Saint Chad's, George Jefferies, Michael O'Sullivan, of Saint Peter's and J. P Burke of Saint Mary's Handsworth, Letter to the Editor, Midland Counties Herald, 7 December 1848.

<sup>89</sup> Joshua Graves, Letters to the Editor, Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 14, 18 December 1848.

<sup>90</sup> B.R.L., Birmingham Institutions, C.4., Miller, J. C., Bible Burning: The Substance of a Sermon Preached in Saint Martin's Church Birmingham 10th December 1848,

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Hamilton Adams and Co., London, 1848, p.8. The text was published in London and Birmingham and was probably used as a political pamphlet for wide distribution as the title page contains the information that it was to be sold for threepence "or Sixteen Shillings per Hundred". Miller was an active anti-Catholic preacher, see footnote 440.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> It must have been obvious to the militant Protestants of the town that the exploitation of contentious issues of faith such as an attack on the Bible would raise inter-faith/ethnic tensions and was a useful tool for evangelical recruitment and support. By bringing the two religions into direct public confrontation, publicity was engendered and the issue became expanded into the local and national discourse on Catholic versus Protestant. This was a form of religious boundary maintenance. These lessons would be remembered in the context of 1867.

<sup>94</sup> Wolffe, op. cit., pp.157-8; Birmingham Protestant Association Record, No.2, op. cit., November 1866.

<sup>95</sup> The Protestant Watchman of the Midland District, Partridge and Oakey, London, 1867, p.5.

<sup>96</sup> Briggs, 1953, op. cit., p.3.

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<sup>97</sup> Birmingham Protestant Association Record, No. 3, op. cit., December, 1866.

<sup>98</sup> The issue of Ritualism was also being addressed at this time in a lecture led by J. H. Aston. Ibid, No. 5, April 1867, p.4; ibid, No. 3, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, No.5, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, No. 4, January 1867

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, No. 6, June 1867, p.1; Father Gavazzi also visited Wolverhampton in 1866 and soldiers were sent from Birmingham as well as police from Stafford as “The Town was alarmed by rumors of a threatened attack upon lecturer and hall...” The Protestant Record of Birmingham and Neighbourhood, No. 21, April 1866.

<sup>103</sup> McFarland, op. cit., pp.1-10.

<sup>104</sup> The Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Origins, Nature and Extent of Orange Institutions in Great Britain and the Colonies, op. cit., p.vi.

<sup>105</sup> As Foster points out. Foster, op. cit., p.275



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<sup>106</sup> The Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Origins, Nature and Extent of Orange Institutions in Great Britain and the Colonies, op. cit., p.x.

<sup>107</sup> Neal, F., Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience, 1819-1914, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987, pp.16-17.

<sup>108</sup> Senior, H., Orangeism in Ireland and Britain 1795-1836, Routledge and Keegan Paul, Toronto, 1966, p.151.

<sup>109</sup> Neal, op. cit., p.18.

<sup>110</sup> Senior, op. cit., p.153.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p.171.

<sup>112</sup> Neal, op. cit., pp.30-1

<sup>113</sup> Ibid p.24.

<sup>114</sup> MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., pp.140-1.

<sup>115</sup> Neal, op. cit., p.70.

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<sup>116</sup> B.C.A., Ms1250/1, Minute Book of the Orange Order Birmingham, 5 May 1864, 4, June 1864, 25 October 1864, 7 June 1867.

<sup>117</sup> Senior, op. cit., p.157.

<sup>118</sup> Paz points out the lower middle class domination of the anti-Catholic organizations in Birmingham. Neal, op. cit., p.32; Paz, op. cit., pp.289-90.

<sup>119</sup> MacRaild, 1998, op. cit., pp.148-52.

<sup>120</sup> Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Origins, Nature and Extent of Orange Institutions in Great Britain and the Colonies, op. cit., p.179.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p.x and p.183.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid pp.xvi-xviii.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p.xviii.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p.x.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p.43.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p.xix.

<sup>129</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order Birmingham, op. cit., 5 May 1864.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 7 June 1867, 1 November 1867.

<sup>131</sup> The deputation also included Brothers D.M. Everette, G. J. May, G. H. Jones, M. G. C. Buck and M. G. C. Lewis. Aris's Gazette, 6 June 1864.

<sup>132</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order Birmingham, op. cit., 14 June 1864.

<sup>133</sup> One Edward Jones was given £1.14 to defer costs of his Liverpool trip. Ibid, 26 July 1864.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 4 June 1864, 13 June 1865.

<sup>135</sup> Aris's Gazette, 6 June 1864.

<sup>136</sup> MacRaild, D., "Associatioanlism, Collective Self-Help and the Protestant Irish in Britain: The Case of the Orange Order, 1870s-1914", unpublished paper given to the



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Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, 7 February, 2000. I am grateful to Dr. MacRaild for allowing me to use his paper.

<sup>137</sup> Daily Gazette, 30 June 1865; Minute Book of the Orange Order of Birmingham, op. cit., 7 September 1866.

<sup>138</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 2, 5, 27 November 1867; 6 December 1866; 4 January 1867; 1 March 1867; 1, 4 April 1867; 4, 29, May 1867; 3, 7 June 1867.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 5 July 1867; 2 August 1867; 1, 6, 13 September 1867; 4, 26 October 1867; 1 November 1867; 6 December 1867.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 8 November 1865.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 6 April 1866.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 6 September 1867; 3 January 1868.

<sup>143</sup> One John Bruton, Ibid, 2 August 1867.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 6 September 1867.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 5 October 1866.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 3 January 1868.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 2 August 1867.

<sup>148</sup> The deputation of Lodge No. 200 Bath Street consisted of Brothers Newley (Worshipful Master), Mee, (Deputy Master), Gameton senior and two sons, Hubitt, and Bullock. Ibid, 5 October 1866; 4 April 1866. The Bath Street lodge was close to Saint Chad's Cathedral and much Catholic activity.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 6 September 1867.

<sup>150</sup> MacRaild, 2000, op. cit.

<sup>151</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 1 November, 6 December 1867; 3 January 1868.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 25 October 1864.

<sup>153</sup> Whitehead and the extra Brother received 2s 6d, Hill and Stuart 3s 6d. Ibid, 6 April 1866; 4 May 1866. The opening of the new Wolverhampton Lodge was attended by Brothers Whitehead, Hill, Stuart, Aston, Grimley, Smith, Scott, Clutterbuck, Robb and Hargreaves. Ibid, 1 June 1866.

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<sup>154</sup> Lodge members also attended meetings with the Liverpool Grand Lodge on the 1 July 1867. Ibid, 7 July 1867.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 13 September 1864.

<sup>156</sup> The Lodge raised £4. 8s. 6d. T. H. Aston paid £1. 1s. J. H. Stuart, Edward Jones, Frederick Hill and Brother Jackson, all paid £10s. 6d. Stephen Nixon, William Robb, Edward Smith, W.A. Mayers, J. M. Brindley and Brother Valentine all paid 5s. 6d. Ibid, 6 July 1865.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 6 July 1866.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 1 March 1867.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 1 November 1867.

<sup>160</sup> The Woolpack of Moor Street was owned by a charity that was established in the Will of one William Lench. Muirhead, J. H., (ed.), Birmingham Institutions, Cornish Bros., Birmingham, 1911, p.15; Minute Book of the Birmingham Orange Order, op. cit., July 12 1864. The Woolpack was also where Murphy lodged during the 1867 riots and the venue chosen by the Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union for its public meeting after the disturbances. Murphy was present as was T.H. Aston, and others from the Albert Lodge. Birmingham Gazette, 24 June 1867; B.R.L., Birmingham Riots, D.6., Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham, E., Smith,



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Birmingham, 1867, p.4. Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham was most likely published (and probably written) by the same Edward Smith who was a prominent member of the Albert lodge, contributing funds towards the clearance of lodge debts and attending as an Albert lodge representative the inauguration of the Wolverhampton lodge in 1866. Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 6 July 1865; 1 June 1867. A Brother Smith is mentioned in the minutes as a printer or publisher. Ibid, 6 April 1866. Edward Smith also authored a copy of the funeral sermon given at William Murphy's funeral that was published by the Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union. He was also elected Grand Master of the Albert Lodge in May 1867 just before the Murphy Riots. Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 7 May 1867.

<sup>161</sup> Birmingham Gazette, 30 June 1865.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Among the Reverends "crimes" were the use of lighted candles, the ceremonial mixing of wine and water, making the sign of the cross towards the congregation, standing with his back to the same during the prayer for consecration, the use of wafers instead of bread, elevation of the cup and paten more than is necessary, causing the *Angus Dei* to be sung immediately after the consecration, standing instead of kneeling during the confession and kissing the prayer book. The Reverend was eventually replaced after being committed for contempt in 1880 where after he was

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jailed at Warwick gaol for a month. Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham, op. cit. pp.272-3; Paz, op. cit., pp.257-8.

<sup>164</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 2 November 1866. Only eight members made it to the supper at the Woolpack in 1864 due to heavy snow. Ibid, 31 January 1864.

<sup>165</sup> MacRaild, 2000, op. cit.,.

<sup>166</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 2 August 1867.

<sup>167</sup> Birmingham Gazette, 9 July 1867.

<sup>168</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 11 October 1864; 12 October 1865; 3 May 1867.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 6 September 1867.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 25 October 1864; 1, 12, November 1864.

<sup>171</sup> On receiving the gift Whitehead opined that he "hoped the Lodge would prosper and strike terror into the camp of the enemy". Ibid, 27 November 1866.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 7 November 1865; 6 July 1865.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 7 September 1866.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 1 March 1867; 3 May 1867; 1 November 1867; 7 February 1868; 6 March 1868.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 4 April 1867.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 6 July 1866

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 1 December 1865; 6 April 1866; 4 May 1866; 13 September, 1867; 6 July 1865.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 11 January 1865.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 6 April 1866.

<sup>180</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp.10-19.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, pp.69-71.

<sup>182</sup> Minute Book of the Birmingham Orange Order, op. cit., 5 October 1866.



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<sup>183</sup> The claimant was one Arthur Orton, an ex-butcher who claimed to be Sir Roger Tichbourn, missing heir to a Baronetcy and the fortune that came with it. The case caused much public sensation at the time, Orton eventually being imprisoned for perjury and Whalley was fined £250, on pain of imprisonment, for contempt of court in writing a letter of support to the Peterborough Times which then, with his permission, sent copies to the London press. Refusing to pay he too was imprisoned for a short time in Holloway gaol until his sister paid his fine. What this shows was Whalley's commitment to a cause and his shrewd manipulation of the media as much publicity was gained by his stance on the issue. Annual Register, Rivingtons, London, 1878, p.176; "The Tichbourn Case", Annual Register, Ibid, 1874, pp.184-5; Boase, F., Modern English Biography, Vol. 3., Neverton and Warth, Truro, 1901, p.1293; Illustrated London News, 19 October 1878.

<sup>184</sup> Illustrated London News, *ibid*.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*. In 1871 Vanity Fair commented on him in a satirical tone - while mentioning his anti-Catholicism as a major marker of his life and referring to the infamous tract so closely associated with William Murphy The Confessional Unmasked: "Mr. Whalley is the one great believer in Roman Catholicism. He is, probably, more or less aware that there exist questions of foreign and domestic policy and of social organisation with which a House of Commons is supposed to occupy itself. But he cares for none of these things. Through a special revelation afforded him by Providence for the salvation of his country, he is the one man who is thoroughly aware that the Church of Rome is the one motive power in the world, and that all the play and action of public affairs,

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traced by shallower minds to more immediate causes, are in reality nothing more than the outcome of a vast Romish conspiracy against the Protestant religion. It might be feared that now the pope is so shorn of his temporal attributes Mr. Whalley's occupation would be gone, but that would be to misjudge him most unjustly. He will still find the hand of the arch-conspirator everywhere and in everything, and he can but regard the occupation of Rome by the Italians as the last and most astute act in the comedy through which the Jesuits govern the world. He has unmasked the confessional, he has made the pope tremble over his billiard table, and has nearly saved England from the folly of doing justice to Ireland. Yet, withal, he is as modest as he is great. Though blessed by nature with a magnificent vocal organ, duly appreciated by the Commons, and though continually urged to do so, were it but for his own fame's sake, he has never consented to sing either his own praises or the merits of the great cause of which he has made himself the champion." Vanity Fair, "Statesmen No. LXXV", 18 February 1871.

<sup>186</sup> Norman, op. cit., p.2.

<sup>187</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.124.

<sup>188</sup> Wolffe, op. cit., p.280

<sup>189</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., pp.88-89.

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<sup>190</sup> Indeed they were described by a pamphlet published after the Riots in Birmingham as “formed by an ultra-bigoted section of the Orange faction, which had seceded from the original order in disgust at their moderation in effecting that opposition to Catholicism.”. Not all the members of Albert Lodge were in agreement with the methods of the PEMEU and Murphy some greeting his visit to their meeting with approbation and some with acclaim “after the manner peculiar to Orangemen.” MacRaild notes this tendency to disagree. Langford, op. cit., p.1; MacRaild, 2000, op. cit.; Birmingham Gazette, 9 July 1867.

<sup>191</sup> Paz, op. cit., p.38.

<sup>192</sup> Arnstein, 1982, op. cit., p.89.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p.90.

<sup>194</sup> P.R.O., HO 45/7991/21. Pamphlet advertising The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the Depravity of the Romish Priesthood and the Inquiry of the Confessional and the Questions Put to Females in Confession, Protestant Electoral Union, London, 1865, p.1.

<sup>195</sup> Quoted in above, Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> P.R.O., HO 45/7991/62, Steele, R., No Priest, No Fenian, Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union, London, 1869, p.1.



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<sup>197</sup> Minute Book of the Orange Order in Birmingham, op. cit., 6 September 1867.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 6.

### The Murphy Riots.

During the 1860s the Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union was increasing its sponsorship of lectures throughout the country and was employing professional religious firebrand preacher William Murphy to spearhead an anti-Catholic campaign. Murphy - though not alone - typified a form of extreme rabble rousing anti-Catholic oratory. His rhetorical style was emotive and violent and his lectures were tirades against Catholicism and its adherents accusing them of lechery, infanticide, seduction and a list of other pejorative and blatantly inflammatory insults. These events also had an instrumental propagandist profile as the format of a public meeting, with petitions, speeches, resolutions and declarations, were attractive to journalists and inevitably campaigns conducted in this manner received good publicity in the local and national media. His lectures were popular involving an element of entertainment and spectacle but often ended in violence against Catholics and their property, the Irish being inevitably targeted. A meeting in Essex during which Murphy told his congregation that "all converts in England ought to be burnt" resulted in the crowd incinerating the local convent.<sup>1</sup> In Wolverhampton in 1867 the violence surrounding his meetings prompted the Mayor to petition the Home Office to give the local authority powers to ban his meetings. This was granted to the Mayor of Birmingham on his appearance there and no public building was made available for him. This was to become the excuse for Murphy apologists who blamed this act of suppressing free speech, along with Catholic Irish, for the riots.<sup>2</sup> With the overt support of the Birmingham Protestant Association, and the covert support of the Birmingham Orange Order, Murphy set up a large tent called the Tabernacle on a piece of wasteland in Carr's

Lane - close to the Congregationalist chapel that had organised much of the anti-Catholic propaganda in Birmingham surrounding the Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy and right next to the Park Street and Allison Street "Irish" area.

William Murphy was the eldest son of a Protestant convert schoolteacher from Limerick. According to the oration given at his funeral, his father was persecuted by Catholics in Ireland after his conversion and William would work in the fields to support his family for 4d a day. He went on to gain employment as a school teacher at £10 a year. He quickly became a Scripture Reader under the Old Irish Society, a Protestant evangelical organisation who were instrumental in his Father's and subsequently his family's conversion. He spent a number of years working for them before becoming a missionary of the Irish Church Missions which he spent eight years pursuing. "Being desirous to extend his work" he settled for a short time in Bristol under the ministry of the Rev. S. A. Walker, who, "thoroughly convinced of his Christian character and religious zeal as a worker in the Lord's vineyard" set him on his career as a Protestant lecturer. His first public lecture was in Cardiff in 1863 and he travelled on to most of the major towns of England.<sup>3</sup> He preached for some four years in Britain before becoming a national figure due to the violence that accompanied his lectures from 1867 onwards. The first lecture to create these problems was in Wolverhampton in February 1867, but it was the tumultuous week of rioting in Birmingham that made him a household name throughout the nation as the most notorious anti-Catholic preacher in the land.<sup>4</sup> He was recruited in the 1860s by the PEMEU in London by its President Robert Steel.<sup>5</sup>

That the riots that Murphy instigated in Wolverhampton, Birmingham (and elsewhere) were a recruiting tool for the PEMEU, Protestant Association and Orange Order has



already been demonstrated. His campaign in Birmingham was so successful that after the riots of June 1867 he moved to the town and purchased and founded the Protestant chapel in Wrottesley Street which became his religious base and a platform for preaching his particular brand of evangelical Christianity. He had a home nearby.<sup>6</sup> Murphy also canvassed monies for a permanent Protestant Hall of his own. The Albert Lodge was approached for help and funds to a mixed reception.<sup>7</sup> The last sermon Murphy preached in his chapel was on 7 July 1871, some three months after the attack on him in Whitehaven that was said to have eventually led to his death, although he did manage to revisit the place in December to give two more sermons.<sup>8</sup>

Murphy's 1867 tour commenced in violence at Wolverhampton before moving on to Birmingham. Murphy and his adjuncts began his assault on Birmingham by placing large placards around the town to advertise a meeting in the Town Hall which he would address to consider the Irish Church Bill (demonstrating the importance of the disestablishment issue). The Mayor was reluctant to grant this as he explained in a telegram to the Home Secretary after the worst of the rioting had subsided. The Mayor had had Murphy arrested for attempting to gain entrance to the gathering. The advertisement for the meeting had unsettled him - pointing to the provocative propaganda tactics employed by Murphy and his Orange backers.

"This announcement respecting a man who has created so much tumult and riot, in Birmingham and other towns...impressed me with the conviction that if Mr. Murphy entered the Town Hall, no precaution or powers could preserve the peace. I determined therefore at any hazard to prevent so great a calamity as a riot by giving instructions to the Chief of

Police to arrest him if he so persisted in an attempt to enter the hall and detain him until the close of the meeting.”<sup>9</sup>

The Mayor believed that he was morally, if not legally, justified in arresting Murphy. “You will perceive I consulted nothing but necessity.”<sup>10</sup> Another important issue was the distribution of the Confessional Unmasked which was openly sold by Murphy and his associates in the town and in shops. It was advertised and placarded “in every street” and it was alleged that every means was taken to incite notoriety and “Stimulate public curiosity in the work”. The Mayor described the tract in these terms:

“The Confessional Unmasked is a work of the most unspeakable filthy character, and is acknowledged to be so by its publishers...it is a collection of the most obscene passages from some works alleged to be text books of the Roman Catholic priests with English translations more or less accurate and intended, as is alleged, to expose the true nature of the “confessional” according to the theoretical doctrine, if not the practice of the Church of Rome”<sup>11</sup>

The Mayor complained that Women and youths had obtained copies - even though it is not supposedly sold to them - as well as “pupils of the Grammar School”. “It is believed impossible for anyone to peruse the pages of that book without being corrupted in mind and morals”. In one week after the riots The Confessional Unmasked sold upwards of 30,000 copies in Birmingham according to the Mayor, providing the PEMEU with funds and propaganda.<sup>12</sup>



Although Murphy was refused permission by the Mayor of Birmingham to attend this meeting in the Town Hall, it was asserted that the Birmingham Protestant Association built him his wooden "Tabernacle" in the aforementioned "Irish Quarter" to deliver his address.<sup>13</sup> Holding up to 4,000 in this improvised lecture hall/tent, he began his orations on Sunday 16 June. There were two lectures that day, one in the afternoon and one in the evening with the appearance of the Rev. Dr. Armstrong (who chaired the evening lecture), Colonel Brockman and George Whalley on the platform.<sup>14</sup> During one of the lectures he opined that he would "Kill Popery in Birmingham" and that the "Virgin Mary was Protestant"<sup>15</sup> and in a later lecture he alleged that there had been found "a large quantity of bones" on the site of a former nunnery.<sup>16</sup> A small mainly Irish crowd started insulting the gathering as they went in. Scuffles with the five police on duty took place as the crowd began to swell and a detective from Leicester was injured receiving a severe kick to the leg.<sup>17</sup> Some arrests were made and the police escorted their prisoners to Moor Street police station under a hail of sticks and bricks. A woman had her nose broken after a police charge with cutlasses and several more were seriously injured and taken to the General Hospital. The police managed to clear the area for the end of the lecture and allow the congregation to disperse. But the disturbances continued with the Irish collaborating in some force. By five o'clock High street, Dale End, Moor Street and the Carr's Lane area were crowded. A mob uprooted some railings and charged the police, who counterattacked and the contestation went back and forth in scenes of high excitement. By six o'clock that evening Carr's Lane was in the hands of the crowd when 60 police arrived. Barricades were erected and the Irish joined in great numbers. Cutlasses were drawn by the police and reinforcements sent for from all districts as the crowd took over more streets. A house was raised by fire and fights between English and Irish broke out within the crowd.<sup>18</sup>



The house of T. H. Aston - president of the Protestant Association and prominent member of the Birmingham Orange Order Albert Lodge - was attacked as it was rumoured that Murphy had taken up residence there.<sup>19</sup> The crowd smashed all the windows with stones, and broke all the furniture. Meanwhile Murphy had resumed preaching at the Tabernacle declaring that "he would prove to the people of Birmingham that every Popish priest was a murderer and a cannibal, a liar and a pick pocket".<sup>20</sup> By this time the Mayor and a number of the town's clergy and dignitaries (including the magistrates as well as Canon O'Sullivan the Vicar-General of Saint Chad's) were trying to restore order by going amongst the multitude and speaking to the crowd. This worked to some extent but proved to be the lull before the storm. Carr's Lane Chapel was guarded by police at both entrances, especially on the Moor Street side. By 8.30pm the Irish element of the crowd had disappeared but a larger crowd of what was described as "roughs" had assembled. A full scale fight with the police ensued with 26 arrests. The disturbances were thus broken up.<sup>21</sup> T. H. Aston, and Colonel Brockman complained about this and other matters pertaining to the constabulary's behaviour to the Police Chief Mr. Glossop.<sup>22</sup>

On the Monday the area of Carr's Lane was filled with "Men, women and children in a state of frenzied excitement" with many "of the lower-class Irish" milling around and the crowd growing throughout the day. By now the police had 350 men on the streets keeping order each armed with a cutlass and a truncheon. In addition 450 middle class special constables were sworn in, consisting of professionals, merchants, tradesmen and labourers distinguished by the wearing of a white ribbon and armed with truncheons. A special meeting was called by the Watch committee and magistrates to deliberate on what was to be done. After some discussion it was decided to send telegraphs to the Home Office

requesting the assistance of the armed forces. The Mayor stated that the presence of Mr. Murphy:

“...is creating intense excitement here. We have had serious disturbances and expect more. At the barracks there are only 71 cavalry (officers and men). We have 350 policemen. I consider the forces here inadequate for the occasion and have telegraphed to the commandant of the district at Manchester for 100 infantry and more cavalry.”<sup>23</sup>

A deputation of Whalley, Brockman, Armstrong, and Steel from the PEMEU, addressed this Watch committee meeting, somewhat to the annoyance of the Mayor who had no time to enter in to a rather esoteric discussion concerning free speech.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Armstrong, in his own account of the meeting, opined that Mr. Murphy must be allowed to continue as if not “it would be regarded as an admission that he was in some degree responsible for what had occurred.”<sup>25</sup> About twelve o’clock a large wooden cross adorned with green ribbons was held aloft by some men in Freeman Street.<sup>26</sup> Around two o’clock in the afternoon a police constable received serious injuries from a brick hitting his head and then having his ear nearly severed with his own cutlass before having his arm broken.<sup>27</sup> At some point a stone was aimed at the Mayor.<sup>28</sup> From 3pm to 8pm mob law took over Birmingham.<sup>29</sup> Shops were being looted by and this was given as sufficient reason to call in the military. The 8th Hussars subsequently rode up Park Street and the Riot Act was read to the assembled rabble in Park Street, Moor Street and the Bull Ring<sup>30</sup> calling “for all orderly and decent persons to betake themselves to their homes or ordinary places of business”.<sup>31</sup>



By now pubs were being looted and smashed asunder and the destruction to property was great. Several lodging houses in Bordesley Street were partially demolished and the English fought the Irish all over the area. Men were on the roofs tearing off tiles and throwing them and other debris down upon the crowd. The battle continued until every house on Park Street (bar one belonging to Messrs. Shaw) were wrecked, every window broken, the frames torn out and smashed, the contents of shops and the furniture of homes thrown out into the street.<sup>32</sup>

The crowd, now mainly English ruffians, attacked the Roman Catholic church on Moor Street along with the Irish priest Father Sherlock's house which was opposite. The entrance gates and windows were destroyed.<sup>33</sup> Albert Edwards aged 17 of Phillip Street Aston and member of the self styled "party of order" that was patrolling the streets, was fined 20s and costs for smashing a chapel window. Irishman Michael Welsh was sentenced to 14 days in gaol for the same offence, this time aiming a stone at a pawnbrokers.<sup>34</sup> Another Irish woman Mary Keegan was fined 2s 6d for throwing stones at the police.<sup>35</sup> All Roman Catholic establishments were being guarded. Some windows at the Cathedral were smashed and the Sisters of Mercy in Handsworth, hearing the roar of the crowd some two miles away, prepared to be attacked. Gentlemen armed with pikes and revolvers arrived to protect the Convent, along with other "less gentlemanly" types carrying knives and hatchets. One old Chaplain, Provost Bayhall, armed himself with a rusty sword.<sup>36</sup>

There was looting throughout the area and the soldiers and crowd were locked in battle until peace was finally restored late that night. In Park street the houses were left doorless, windowless and some roofless – the road and pavement was broken up and covered with debris and broken furniture.



“The inhabitants - confined to women and children only, (the men having been removed by direction of the authorities), huddled in corners and mourned over the absence of the male portion of their family, and the wreck of their little all in a silence only interrupted in some half frantic wail of lamentation, or the bursts of crying from the children. The front parts of the houses on either side of the road having been destroyed, the interiors were left exposed to the weather, destitute of furniture whilst the unfortunate occupants were compelled to make the most of the trifling shelter afforded them.”<sup>37</sup>

This destruction of Park street was carried out by the aforementioned gang of vigilantes calling themselves “the party of order”, consisting principally of:

“Pugilists, pick-pockets, garotters and that general grade in social life termed “the dangerous classes” who coalesced with the police, till, at 9 o’clock, the Irish were driven from the field and the military paraded the street.”<sup>38</sup>

Although it is stated that the police did their best to prevent excesses on both sides they:

“..evidently took part with the English and rushed into the various houses, dragged out every Irishman, and locked them up in the Police Station, whilst the “party of order” marched up and down the street, armed with legs of tables or chairs, bedposts, pieces of wainscoting or

shutters, singing the "Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!" chorus in triumphant exultation."<sup>39</sup>

During the night mobs had roamed the area smashing windows and looting shops including Mr. O'Hagan's grocery in Allison Street.<sup>40</sup> By that evening 100 persons were in custody.<sup>41</sup>

The Tuesday began peacefully with police and military guarding the streets (special attention was given to Saint Chad's and the Oratory that had been threatened by "the party of order") as well as a number of arms manufactories in the Saint Mary's area that - rumour had it - would be attacked for weapons.<sup>42</sup> A placard appeared on the streets exclaiming "Protestants to the Rescue".<sup>43</sup> The Irish were said to be "thoroughly subdued" by now and apart from a small riot in Barford Street and the threat of a gathering in Lease Lane and a fight between an Irishman and an Englishman outside the London and North Western railway station in Queen Street, the night went relatively peacefully compared to previous nights apart from one notable incident that points to the sectarian religious nature of the disturbances.<sup>44</sup> About four to five hundred youths attacked the Synagogue with stones breaking twenty four windows as well as six more in the attached school room. After severely beating an innocent local resident and robbing him of his watch and chain they dispersed. This attack was unexpected and not quartered for despite the arrival of the requested military reinforcements that evening from Manchester.<sup>45</sup>

The Wednesday passed peacefully and the emergency security forces were stood down apart from extra police in the Carr's Lane, Moor Street, Lichfield Street, Park Street and John Street areas.<sup>46</sup> Thursday was the same, the military not needing to leave their barracks. Throughout all this, Mr. Murphy gave his lectures to large enthusiastic audiences and

encouraged the anti-Catholic crowd to seek revenge. Murphy remained for five weeks in Birmingham and his lectures continued at various venues in the town but especially the Carr's Lane Protestant Lecture Hall.<sup>47</sup> Whalley was on the platform with Murphy in Birmingham when he gave his lecture on 1 July - symbolically, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne under the old Julian calendar - entitled "Saint Patrick, A Protestant".<sup>48</sup>

At the height of the riots the Mayor estimated the numbers of people on the streets at between 50,000 and 100,000, although those who were willing to instigate rioting were numbered in hundreds. The Mayor was of the opinion that the PEMEU were intrinsically as much to blame as Murphy and singled out Whalley, Armstrong and Brockman as leading members. He also took offence to Murphy's incitement of the crowd, especially his opining after the attack on the Mayor that he "should get a couple of more blows".<sup>49</sup> Murphy indeed concentrated much of his vitriol on the Mayor's refusal to grant him use of public property opining that "There was a stone thrown at him today. I hope it will do him good...and the Popish stone will let him see what Popery is...and he will be better if he gets a couple of more stones."<sup>50</sup> The destruction of property was great, legal claims for compensation amounted to £1,562. 1s for 174 individuals, although only three were eligible under the law and actual compensation given was £71. 9s. Hundreds were injured<sup>51</sup> and one Irish man, John M'Nally, was murdered by the publican Morris Roberts (a great upholder of Mr. Murphy) in an altercation connected to the riots some days later. As he was assaulted first by the murder victim in his hostelry he was acquitted on the grounds of "justifiable homicide" by the inquest.<sup>52</sup>



In his letter to the Home Secretary of 29 June 1867, the Mayor pointed to a number of important issues arising out of the disturbances. Firstly that the publication and sale of the Confessional Unmasked was instrumental in the riots. Secondly that the conduct and character of Murphy were also responsible for the riots. The Mayor requested that the Home secretary submit the book to Law Officers of the Crown in order to ascertain whether it committed an offence against Common Law and if the publishers, sellers, and all those involved in its promotion were liable to indictments of that offence.<sup>53</sup> This was a clear attempt to criminalise the PEMEU as Whalley, Brockman, and Armstrong admitted that Murphy was their paid agent. This was not heeded and many more riots took place. In the following year, riots over three days at Ashton Under-Lyne resulted in the ransacking of Irish areas and the burning of two chapels, 110 houses and shops concluding in one death.<sup>54</sup>

The Mayor concluded in his letter to the Home Secretary on Murphy that, "His language is most vulgar and insulting to the vast body of Roman Catholics and especially so towards the priests and he implies towards them almost every crime of which humanity is capable". Throughout the week of disturbances Murphy was nightly:

"...indulging in the most violent, coarse, and scurrilous language and the magistrates were advised not only that they had no authority to close the hall and stop the lectures but that it was their duty to take all needful precautions to protect the lecture and persons deserving to hear his lecture from violence and preserve the peace in the town."<sup>55</sup>

As the Mayor had exasperatingly pointed out to the Home Secretary, he had a legal duty to protect Murphy and his audience throughout all this, and indeed Murphy exploited this as he knew the law. Indeed he crowed at his Monday lecture that:

...I must say to the Mayor of Birmingham he must and shall protect me. I say to the Mayor of Birmingham that he is my servant while I am in Birmingham ...and as my servant he must do his duty...he is placed as mayor and Chief Magistrate, and as I am a loyal subject of her Majesty the Queen, I say the Mayor must protect me.”<sup>56</sup>

This was a tactical decision. Murphy knew the mayor must do his utmost to uphold free speech and this was exploited to the maximum effect in order to incite violence and calumny on the Roman Catholics of Birmingham for the ulterior motive of the PEMEU's tendentious political agenda. T. Underwood noted at the time that “The Brummigen Crusade began in malice, hatred and all un-charitableness, carried on with most intolerant bigotry and fanaticism, and terminated in bloodshed, death and disgrace.”<sup>57</sup> Murphy returned for a short visit in August, but “a division had occurred amongst his followers” and he left shortly after a week of “vituperation”.<sup>58</sup>

To try and explain why the outbreak of anti Irish/Catholic violence happened in Birmingham and elsewhere in mid-Victorian Britain and how these criteria helped define a notion of what being Irish meant to British popular discourse and memory, we need to cite the issues in their long term, medium term and short term historical contexts. From here we can perhaps begin to get a grip on what was happening in

Birmingham and the rest of the nation in the mid to late 1860s and how the memory of what had gone before and what was to come was partially shaped by this short violent period.

Perhaps the most long term factors in the history of anti-Irishness are those prejudices and discourses of "Otherness" stemming from the historically incomplete conquest of Ireland from Norman times onwards. The Irish inhabitants' historical resistance to Norman and later English rule as well as their religious orientation marked them out as doubly suspect. This necessitated a project of undermining "Celtic" law, society and language in an attempt to unify and standardise (and eventually Anglicise) the British state. On the other hand, anti-Catholic prejudice in Victorian Britain has its long term roots in the events set in train by the Reformation and the state actions against Catholics from then onwards. Catholics were seen as a threat to the state and were persecuted because of this. At the start of the nineteenth century Roman Catholics were still affected by the 17th century Penal Laws and Test and Corporation Acts that amongst other things excluded them from local government and the House of Commons, as well as restrictions concerning certain property rights. It was not until the 1870s that Catholics were allowed to take up positions in universities and to this day a Catholic can not sit on the throne of the United Kingdom. By the turn of the nineteenth century Catholics were still forbidden to vote, stand for election, hold military commissions or qualify for ministerial office. Their churches could not have steeples and their priests could not wear robes in public; legacies to the Church were viewed suspiciously and, if judged as being towards a "superstitious" cause, illegal.<sup>59</sup> All these measures reinforced the "Otherness" of Catholicity. The burning of the



Roman Catholic Church and convent in Birmingham during the 17th century was an indication of long term legacy of the Reformation in that part of the Kingdom. The attacks on non-conformists during 1715 and the Priestly Riots in 1791 as well as attacks on synagogues in 1813 and 1867 also show a long term tendency for religious sectarianism that can explode into violence in Birmingham.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Roman Catholic priest Father Nutt would go about the town of Birmingham in the disguise and his small church was also masked to resemble a dwelling from the outside. From this period up until the late 1860s there were many examples of anti-Catholic rhetoric and tension within the town. Something that was not unique to Birmingham, but Birmingham had unique features in relation to the Catholic Revival and high profile organised anti-Catholic figures. So there was a long term root to both anti-Irishness and anti-Catholicism that effected both Protestant and Catholic sensibilities that erupted into violence in Birmingham during 1867.

Underlying medium term factors that impacted on the Irish rather than Catholics *per se* included the problems created by mass Irish migration after the Great Famine of the late 1840s and early 1850s, Irish born residents of Birmingham reaching a peak in the 1860s according to the census and other commentators such as Hugh Henrick. This led to much tension and violence over job competition and undercutting of wages by the Irish all over Britain at a time of economic tension in Birmingham. Along with this there were anxieties surrounding issues of health and hygiene in the newly expanding urban centers. The Irish were the most visible of the inhabitants of the poorest parts of

the towns and cities and were causally blamed for the state of their habitation and also for introducing typhoid or "Irish Fever" as it became commonly known.

The fear of the "dangerous masses" and the political and social revolutions in Europe haunted the political nightmares of the "decent" English classes. This fear became intense in light of the ongoing political struggle in Ireland for self rule after the Act of Union in 1800 that grafted Ireland to Britain and dissolved the parliament in Dublin. Rebellions, agrarian violence and agitation were a constant feature of Anglo-Irish relations throughout the century and significantly in the late 1860s were taking a violent turn in England, Ireland and Canada with invasions, revolts, bombings and murders as a result of the Fenian uprisings. Coupled with this were the more close to home problems of economic downturn and Reform agitation that focused press and public attention on the dangers of Fenianism and revolution. John Denvir noted that Fenianism was very popular in Birmingham among the Irish, - arms were being procured from the town for the Fenians - and the PEMEU were quick to link Catholic priests and Fenians as well as making a specific link between Catholicism, the Irish and violence. All this was at a time of Protestant revival due to other issues such as the campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and an ongoing low level agitation against Catholicism as a creed and the Church as an institution as typified by the attacks by Charles Newdegate and others. Throughout the century the clarion call of "No-Popery" was a significant force utilised for political ends; stimulated by Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Oxford/Tractarian Controversy and restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in the 1850s. All this created a climate of intolerance towards Catholics - and especially Irish Catholics - in the mid-Victorian period that was ripe for exploitation by political actors. The Birmingham Diocese, having Oxford in its See, was a centre of Anglo-



Catholicism and the Catholic revival. Birmingham was chosen as the site for the first new post Reformation Catholic Cathedral, a new Convent and the premier Catholic educational establishment. With their bold gothic architecture they all displayed a new Catholic confidence and purpose after a long period of repression. Within these new establishments resided active high profile priests and theologians such as John Henry Newman, intellectuals and writers for prominent Catholic publications such as The Dublin Review. Thus the viper in the breast of British Protestantism was manifest in Birmingham to those extreme elements who wished to exploit the area for national and local political purposes. The agency of small groups like PEMEU with their influential members such as George Whalley MP - who although a Liberal was also an Orangeman and the defence of Protestantism came before party politics and the Liberals movements towards supporting Irish nationalism. Whalley's close association with other nationally active anti-Catholics in the area such as Charles Newdegate and Richard Spooner and his links to the Birmingham Protestant Association/Orange Order with their long standing low level attacks on Catholics in the town also played a part in the riots. Also, the incipient post Reform 1868 election was around the corner with its incorporation of working class men into the franchise. The Conservative tactic of exploiting the "Orange Card" for political gain had been recorded by Millward from as early as the 1850s.<sup>60</sup> Murphy spoke to these people in a language they understood and recognised.

The short term factors that sparked the riots included the panic that swept the country regarding Irish political militants after the Fenian invasion of Canada and especially the British campaign that started in Chester and then in Ireland. This created an immediate climate of fear and suspicion against the Irish stoked up by a hostile press and the appearance of military on the streets to guard against the Fenian threat. Then there was



the politically involved Irish Fenian element in Birmingham to link anxieties over poverty, health, class, ethnicity, religion, job competition at a time of relative scarcity, and revolutionary politics. Into this long, medium and short term context came the PEMEU sponsored Murphy. So the tinder was dry in Birmingham - and elsewhere in Britain - all it needed was the short term spark of William Murphy and his supporters to set up a provocative lecture in the "Irish area" to provoke a reaction for the furtherance of their own political agenda and gain a publicity coup that would propel them and their views onto the national stage. A vote for Conservative candidates who upheld the Protestant Constitution at a time of electoral reform was another probable thought in their motivations as was the recruitment of new blood to the Protestant cause; and they were highly successful in each case. The final short term spark was the attack upon those entering Murphy's Tabernacle by the Catholic Irish and the following riots were therefore inevitable. Thus we can begin to unravel what was happening at this important time in Birmingham and the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Richter, D., Riotous Victorians, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1991, pp.35-6.

<sup>2</sup> See Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham, op. cit., p.8; The Rev. M. Macfie, Congregationalist minister of Birmingham in the Birmingham Gazette, 28 June 1867; "The Birmingham Riots: Who is to Blame?" Birmingham Gazette, Ibid, 8 July 1867; "Huston's Defence of Murphy" Ibid, 26 August 1867. Two decades later this explanation was still being recycled. "The Murphy Riots" Birmingham Mercury, 13 June 1885.

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<sup>3</sup> B.R.L., Birmingham Institutions, C.16, Smith, E., The Funeral Sermon of the Late Mr. William Murphy, Together with a Short History of His Early Life and an Account of His Death. Preached at the Protestant Chapel Wrotesley Street Birmingham On Sunday March 24th 1872, Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union, London, 1872, pp.15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Arnstein, W., L., "The Murphy Riots: A Victorian Dilemma", Victorian Studies, Vol. 19, 1975, p.56.

<sup>5</sup> The funeral oration and service seems to have had a charitable function as Murphy's wife (present of course) is mentioned in favorable terms a number of times. The moving death bed scene is used to remind the audience that he had nothing to leave his wife. The final appeal for funds to support his dependents comes at the end. Memorial of the late Mr. Murphy were produced for 1d and large ones with a portrait for 1s. Other gifts were available for the "Widow Fund" and a tract entitled "Mr. William Murphy The Murdered Martyr of 1872". Smith, E., 1872, op. cit., pp.21-24.

<sup>6</sup> Daily Post, 10 March 1870.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy attended the meeting of the Albert Lodge in July 1867 and canvassed for monies and help in opening a Protestant Hall capable of holding large numbers in order to create a space in which "freedom of speech and liberty of conscience would be held." He used the one at Carr's Lane Chapel in the meantime. "Mr. W. Murphy and the Orangemen in Birmingham", Birmingham Gazette, 9 July 1867.



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<sup>8</sup> Smith, E., 1872, op. cit., p.17; Birmingham Gazette, 9 July 1867. The “Martyr Murphy” died aged 48 of a disease of the throat and lung that was described as consumption by Mr. Oliver Pemberton who conducted the *post-mortem*. The general opinion was that this was caused by the injuries Murphy sustained to the chest at the riot at Whitehaven the previous year. However, it is also mentioned that “the disease in the windpipe was no doubt induced by the long continued practice of public speaking, with the voice pitched for lengthy periods beyond its compass.” He was buried in the General Cemetery on Key Hill 12 March 1872. A large crowd of several thousands gathered to watch the cortege gaining in numbers as it proceeded from his Wrottesley Street chapel to the cemetery, blocking the road at one point. Trouble was expected and a mounted police escort was provided. Mourners included churchmen from his original parish in Bristol, Leamington and Wareham as well as some local Weslyans, his brother and widow amongst others. There was a minor riot and arrests later, the return procession and police coming under missile attack by the mob. When passing the area of the 1867 riot a number of old women cursed Murphy and exclaimed pleasure at his passing. Even in death William Murphy was able to stir up violent passions. “The Death of Mr. Murphy”, Birmingham Gazette, 14, 15, 19 March 1872.

<sup>9</sup> Murphy brought charges against the Mayor and Chief of Police for false imprisonment at the Warwickshire spring assizes in 1870 concerning his arrest at another meeting at the Town Hall on the same issue in June 1869. Murphy won and was awarded 40s damages. It is possible that this was orchestrated for propaganda/publicity reasons.



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P.R.O., HO 45/7991/11, Letter from Mayor of Birmingham to Home Secretary, 19 June 1867; Birmingham Daily Post, 1 March 1870.

<sup>10</sup> P.R.O., HO 45/7991/13, Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor and Magistrates of Birmingham to Counsel on Murphy Disturbances, 29 June 1867.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.1. The Birmingham Protestant Association deny this saying that Murphy paid for its erection. They also deny they invited him saying that it was a recently formed branch of the PEMEU in Birmingham that requested him to come to Birmingham. T. H. Aston's sons were on this PEMEU committee. Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham, op. cit., p.4. The publisher of the Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham was very likely to be the already mentioned Edward Smith, Grand Master of Albert Lodge at this time whose funeral speech for William Murphy was published some years later by the PEMEU.

<sup>14</sup> Aris's Gazette, 22 June 1867. Aris's Gazette was pro-Murphy and blamed the riots on the Irish and the Mayor.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 20 June 1867.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 22 June 1867.

<sup>17</sup> Underwood, op. cit., pp.1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> He was actually staying at the Woolpack Hotel. Facts About the Recent Riots in Birmingham, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>20</sup> Other allegations made at the trial for false imprisonment at the Warwickshire spring assizes in 1870 were that he called for Father Sherlock to get a wife as he “can’t do without a woman any more than I can” and that Roman Catholic Bishop Ullathorne was “no better than a whoremonger and a blackguard”. Birmingham Daily Post, 1 March 1870.

<sup>21</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.3.

<sup>22</sup> Aris's Gazette, 20 June 1867.

<sup>23</sup> P.R.O., HO 45/7991/8, Telegraph from Mayor of Birmingham to Home Secretary, 17 June 1867.

<sup>24</sup> Whalley claimed that Murphy had a right to “freedom of speech” and denied his language was indiscreet. The Times, 19 June 1867.

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<sup>25</sup> The Mayor opined that Murphy was morally responsible for the riots if not legally.

Ibid; Birmingham Daily Post, 18 June 1867.

<sup>26</sup> Birmingham Daily Post, ibid.

<sup>27</sup> John Frankson aged 64. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> The Times, 19 June 1867.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.3. The Riot Act was read at 7.30pm. The Mayor George Dixon wrote again to the Home Secretary informing him of the disturbances and the injured policeman. "...there have been many casualties and in one street inhabited mainly by Irish there has been great destruction of Property." P.R.O., HO 45/7991/9, Letter from Birmingham Police Office to Home Office, 17 June 1867.

<sup>32</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. "Several of the priests and clergy of the Town have expressed fears that the churches will be attacked this evening." P.R.O., HO 45/7991/10, Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor of Birmingham, 18 June 1867.



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<sup>34</sup> He apparently cried “Death to Murphy” on the way to the police station after his arrest. Aris's Gazette, 20 June 1867.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Keirnan, op. cit., p.34.

<sup>37</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> His shop was smashed and the brickwork supporting the windows torn down. Several sides of bacon and other goods were stolen along with £5 in silver, 30s in gold and jewelry valued between £30 and £40. Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The Times, 19 June 1867.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid; Underwood, op. cit., p.5.

<sup>43</sup> Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor of Birmingham, op. cit., 18 June 1867.

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<sup>44</sup> Aris's Gazette, 20 June 1867.

<sup>45</sup> Over 100 men from the 81st Regiment were quartered in the Corn Exchange along with a similar number in the basement of the Town Hall. There were two squadrons of Hussars ready to take horse at a moments notice and a force of ex army pensioners armed and ready at the barracks. Also the local police were also reinforced with 180 constables from neighbouring areas. Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.6. See also Aris's Gazette, June 20 1867.

<sup>47</sup> On the 27 June; 1, 4, 8 and 12 July when his theme was the "Confessional Unmasked". He was attacked after leaving the Hall on the 4th in Moor Street just before he reached The Woolpack Hotel by one John Connolly, a plasterer. Birmingham Gazette, 28 June, 1 July, 5, 9, 13, 19 August 1867.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1 July 1867.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor of Birmingham, 18 June 1867, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> The Times, 19 June 1867.

<sup>51</sup> William Thorne who was himself destined to become an MP remembered the day well as his father passed away of illness at the height of the riots, "hundreds were

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injured and taken to hospital". Thorne, W., My Life's Battles, George Newnes Ltd., London, 1925, p.14.

<sup>52</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.6.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor and Magistrates of Birmingham to Counsel on Murphy Disturbances, 29 June 1867, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Richter, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Home Secretary from Mayor and Magistrates of Birmingham to Counsel on Murphy Disturbances, 29 June 1867, op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> The Times, 19 June 1867.

<sup>57</sup> Underwood, op. cit., p.7. See also Aris's Gazette, 20 June 1867.

<sup>58</sup> Aris's Gazette, ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Paz, op. cit., p.1.

<sup>60</sup> And has historical links with tactics utilized by some members of the present day Conservative and Unionist Party in Britain in playing "the race card" at local and general elections. Strands of anti-Irish sentiment are also still present within the party.



## **IV: Conclusion.**

### **Chapter 7.**

#### **Conclusion.**

Research into Irish migration in nineteenth century Britain falls into three broad periods centred upon the Great Famine of the late 1840s with the group under investigation being mainly immigrants of holding a Catholic, working class identity. Immigrant experience in nineteenth century Britain was more diverse than this, however. The growing body of national, regional and local studies research into Britain's oldest and most numerous immigrant group of the modern period have been concerned with their distinctiveness conceptualised around issues of class, nationalism, religion and ethnicity. Within a context of class anxiety and prejudice, much of the root stock of historical sources have been biased towards the male lower classes and without a detailed investigation of Irish integration in to the class structure, a full picture of Anglo-Irish integration and relations in the Victorian period remains obscured.

It has been argued that these criteria of separateness, class, nationalism, religion and ethnicity, have structured the reactions, perceptions and material lives of the inhabitants of the Victorian City in certain ways. The extreme nastiness of the Victorian City that the Irish immigrant was so readily identified with, was a constant theme of Victorian social and sanitary reformers who often concentrated on the poor Irish immigrant as a social contagion; an ethnicisation of public health that is still

visible within racist discourse up to the present day. Contemporary English working class districts were not as heavily monitored as the Irish areas within a context of overall working class surveillance and developing institutions of law enforcement. The long term violent resistance to British imperialism presented by Irish nationalist movements gave credence to a universal anti-Irish prejudice that their role in the development of working class politics such as Chartism may have reinforced. Political engagement by the Irish may have been mitigated by a conceptualisation of their role as “the enemy within” up until the legitimisation of Home Rule in the 1880s. Although the degree of engagement with religion by the Irish community is still a matter for investigation, the manipulation of the hegemony against the Catholic immigrant Irish had an instrumental side to further economic, political and ideological projects linked to class anxiety and sectarian bigotry, effectively reinforcing ethnic stereotyping of Irish immigrants which in turn may have cemented their own sense of “Irishness” as Catholic. Based upon a perception of discrete national characters, Celtic Irish and Anglo-Saxon English cultural traits were seen to determine behavior. This conception underpinned ethnic prejudices and reduced the arguments over Ireland and the “Condition of England” question to a conflict between two discordant and incompatible “races”. The sophistication of the issues involved is still perplexing researchers and it is hoped that this study has illuminated some of these questions by combining them into a more discursive discussion regarding issues of hegemony, nation building, class anxiety and prejudice to gain a more rounded view of the patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the Victorian City.

The nineteenth century in Britain was characterised by an expanding industrial and colonial economy with the centres of production and residence shifting from the



countryside to the towns and cities. The new era of economic and urban growth drew in migrants from the environs - and beyond - to the expanding urban centres placing strains on the infrastructures and social conditions of the new metropolises. Birmingham was little different to many other developing towns of the era with its social and environmental problems that marked this phase of urban history, but was exceptional for a number of reasons. The religious and political tradition of dissension coupled with a diverse high skill, small-scale production economy with close social relations, as Briggs contends, marked out Birmingham as a dynamic and flexible regional centre for commerce, trade and manufacture enriched by its colonial and world exports. Its politics of radical liberalism produced the Political Union and many innovations of local government that would be copied elsewhere. Its social orientation as a relatively class co-operative, well paid, with favourable working and living conditions led to a high degree of tolerance and social mobility it has been argued. However, the examples of sectarian dissent and violence from the early seventeenth century onwards as well as Chartist activity and the practices of recruitment and education holds a challenge to the ubiquity of this notion and certainly the prejudice shown towards the Irish in Birmingham reflects a more national viewpoint; somewhat undermining Birmingham specificity as a liberal town.

The town had good transport links to Ireland and beyond from the seventeenth century onwards and evidence of the Irish in the Birmingham area begins in this period. Irish travelling and military associations with the surrounding counties and town were evident, as was the tradition of harvesting and later navy work. Those that did settle throughout the nineteenth century came mainly from the West of Ireland perhaps due to a combination of ease of route and pioneer migrants sending for kith and kin linked



to a strong sense of Irish regionalism. Most harvesters came from the West of Ireland to the agricultural region surrounding Birmingham creating knowledge of and experience within the Birmingham locality. A noticeable Irish population is discernible from the mid-eighteenth century including the first signs of a business community. This population had become firmly established by 1800 although distinct ethnic areas were not evident. The size of the discernible community expanded with the numbers that emigrated following the pattern of the Great Famine centred migration, some being pushed or pulled internally to Birmingham through the vagaries of the Poor Law and its interpretation by officers and magistrates locally and nationally. The first mention of a distinct "Irish area" comes in 1828 - although this refers to their improvement as a group going back eight years - and becomes a centre of concern throughout the century with the concentration of anxiety focused on the degradation of the slum area, populated by criminals, prostitutes and the "lowest Irish" residing in insanitary, overcrowded, filthy lodging houses and courts. This concern resulted in the eventual destruction of the area with central development towards the end of the century.

The area that was traditionally considered the "Irish Quarter" in the first half of the century was centred on the London Prentice Street district; the Park Street and Allison Streets becoming the focus of Irish visibility in the latter half of the century. The location of Catholic places of worship and clustering of previous Catholic populations seem to have influenced settlement; but in demographic terms there was no rigidly demarcated "Irish Quarter". The concept of the "Irish Quarter" was in part an imaginary one linked to the clustering of poor Catholic Irish migrants. What singled out the Park Street area - as with London Prentice Street before it - was its status as a lodging-house district, occupied by the poorest members of a distinct ethnic group that

on the whole practised or owed some allegiance to an “alien” religion that was reified as a national threat throughout the nineteenth century Catholic revival. Therefore, these areas became most conspicuous to reform minded middle class observers. The development of negative traits within the written sources as well as the popular imagination must be linked. The focus of state surveillance and the conclusions of the middle class “primary definers” within the social reform movement coupled with locally specific prejudices linked to job competition, religious difference, social conditions and perceived criminality and moral decrepitude fused into a overarching ethnic discourse. Here in the cheap accommodation districts, the issues of class, ethnicity and a non-taxpaying, criminalised, peripatetic population in economic competition with their working class neighbours became markers of prejudice and difference that were linked to the physical and social degradation of the areas in contemporary eyes and became a focus for prejudice and violence. Although the conditions within the Irish residential areas in Victorian Birmingham were similar to other towns and cities, where they differed was in scale and extent. As the government inspectors had noted, Birmingham was blessed with better housing, sanitation and drainage compared to its contemporaries. But this in its own way impacted on the poor Irish disproportionately. They were well represented among the inhabitants of the worse examples of Birmingham slum and as such were blamed unequally for the degradation, poverty and vice, marked out as something of an anomaly within the town. By their physical presence within these areas they became hegemonically co-joined as an ethno-religious-national-class group to the most negative aspects of the Victorian slum. The disappearance after redevelopment of the low class slum districts also coincided with the disappearance of the discernible “Irish Quarter” in the public consciousness. Thus the association of the Irish with deprivation in their definition as an ethnic group by the state



and society is made clear. Once these ethnic low class slum areas, (hegemonically constructed as deprived, criminal, Catholic, Irish over a long period of time) were cleansed, the Irish became practically invisible in Birmingham as a problematised resident group although the memory of this period became important to the significations and construction of Irishness and Britishness alike. From such historical foundations long term memories of Irishness and, by opposition, Englishness and Britishness were forged. The boundaries of ethno-national difference had been defined.

From the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, Birmingham became the leading industrial and commercial centre for the town, city and region. The network of canals, and later railways, that connected Birmingham to the Black Country enriched the economy and fostered growth in Birmingham's various metal, guns, brass, button and jewellery trades stimulated by the expanding consumer markets at home, abroad and within the empire. This expansion was facilitated by scientific and pecuniary capital resources. The population and town grew exponentially as a result of this unprecedented growth, drawing in labour from the UK and abroad and expanding its economy, boundaries and building works thereby providing many economic opportunities for migrant workers.

Some of those that started in harvesting settled in Birmingham as has been noted, and the same could be said for navvies. Their presence also engendered knowledge of potential settlement areas. Some harvesters moved directly into navvying others working with masons in Birmingham. The Irish were mostly recorded as being in the building trade in Birmingham and it must be that the similar "work patterns of



harvesting, navvying and building made this move easier. All have a dependence on good weather to some extent so are seasonal; they encourage a peripatetic lifestyle with its own culture and the availability of diasporic connections to inform on work, routes, accommodation and other local knowledge - a key resource in these trades. That the poor unskilled Irish should move into building (which still contained a high transitory element) is understandable, the skills associated with each trade being similar. Sir Charles Morgan's attempted Bill to prevent the harvesters entering other trades at reaping time shows that this was happening on a large scale, and David Brooke confirms this trend.

The diverse high skill economic base of Birmingham perhaps mitigated Irish emigration to Birmingham. As the Special Correspondent to the Morning Chronicle noted, informed by the diasporic connections of peripatetic Irish workers, the lack of an abundant low skill entry point for the new emigrant made Birmingham less attractive than elsewhere, not least the surrounding industrial area of the "Black Country". This could well explain the comparatively smaller settlement of Irish in Birmingham when compared with other contemporary towns and cities such as Manchester and Liverpool. Those that did settle started on the whole in the low skill stratas of the labour market, but as the century progressed and the community advanced in the skills of the modern urban job market, more and more Irish entered the higher echelons of the labour market as Zeisler's census samples and the evidence of trade directories show. This could be a reflection of the acculturation of the community from a low-skill rural world-view to the more modern urban skilled workforce demanded by Birmingham and its environs.

However, the archetypal Irish labourer in the early part of the century that emerges from government reports and other contemporary sources was male, single, living in lodgings, transitory, sending home remittances to kith and kin, from a rural background with different conceptions of time, work, leisure and domestic economy than the master artisan and middle class commentators called upon by the Government Commissions. Thus the sources have drawn historians - including this one - to this partial view of the group as a whole. As the written sources only seem interested in Irish women in relation to prostitution - which they were seemingly little engaged with despite some of the expectations of the Birmingham medical establishment - the histories of Irish women and more affluent and professional Irish from urban backgrounds have yet to be written.

The role of the Irish as a reserve labour force in the classic Marxist fashion was certainly understood as being true throughout the evidence of contemporary accounts, and some evidence of the Irish as marginal employees, undercutting wages does exist in Birmingham. Harvesters were an integral part of the rural economy but were not welcome to stay especially when there was an abundance of local labour. The evidence of rioting from Irish soldiers over working conditions in 1795 and between English and Irish navvies linked to wage competition - with some navy violence in around Birmingham - points to historical pre-cursors of the tensions to come in the new industrial areas. Evidence by John Thomas given above stated the Irish were paid less than the English in harvesting at least. The less than assertive evidence of William Whittle and others with an interest in controlling wage inflation confirms that they



were paid less and seen as a threat by their fellow workers in the building trade. They were concentrated in the low skill end of the market as elsewhere, but showed an increasing social mobility throughout the century that is difficult to compare with other towns due to the lack of thorough work in this area. Until comparative work is available it is impossible to tell if the Briggs thesis concerning the relative social mobility of labour in the highly diverse workshop culture of the Birmingham economic base did effect Irish social as well as physical migration. The lacuna at the centre of this thesis is its ignorance of anti-Catholicism and its illiberal effects upon the establishment of Catholic businesses at a time of widespread sectarian recruitment practices and how this affected Irish migrant workers. Examples of anti-Irish prejudice from the early part of the century are recorded in the 1834 Report into the State of the Irish poor in Birmingham referring especially to prejudice and resentment among English workers articulated around wage levels. There is also evidence that male and female Irish did indeed toil in areas of the workforce that their English competitors shunned such as builders labourers and domestic service. This said, the competition for harvest work in the prosperous period between 1833 and 1836 that farmer Thomas noted confirms the argument of oversupply in low-skilled labour that Hunt and Williamson have proposed, but this certainly did reduce wages as would be expected. Thus the economic threat presented to those native workers in the town by the Irish became a signifier of their difference and provided an economic underpinning for anti-Irishness and ethno-national boundary creation.

For the poor Catholic Irish in Birmingham, living close to the “Mother Church” or having access to a chapel must have helped to ameliorate some of the culture shock



experienced by rural Catholic Irish migrants moving to the commercial and industrial centre of the Midland region. This influx of Irish that increased the Catholic population and in turn generated responses from the Catholic institutions in Birmingham that themselves were becoming a centre of Catholic revival in Britain and at the forefront of educational, social and pastoral services for their new population. The presence of a new community which provided both resources and burdens prompted new responses from the Church. The role that the Catholic Church, the Sisters of Mercy and Little Sisters of the Poor played in the education, relief and support of the Catholic population - and especially women - in Birmingham made a significant social and moral contribution to the Catholic Irish community's development during this period as is demonstrated by the increasing participation of Irish Catholic support for the varying charities. Social, educational, spiritual, welfare and sometimes political functions were spearhead by the Church. As such a mutually enriching relationship was established that came to be of shared benefit to both groups. However, the resurgence of Catholicism in Birmingham had a negative effect upon the Irish as well, foregrounding as it did the ethno-national-religious boundary between native and migrant identities. This in turn provided ideological and rhetorical ammunition for political entrepreneurs to exploit for instrumental political projects. In the context of 1867, with State and Nation under threat from anti imperialist Irish revolutionaries at home and abroad, religious tensions over Irish supported Catholic revival and the unknown dangers of political enfranchisement of the masses, the fusing of anti-Catholicism with anti-Irishness stoked up by the likes of the PEMEU and the Orange Order resulted in mass outbreaks of violence and political gains for anti-Irish/Catholic politicians.

The study of the Irish in nineteenth century Britain offers an historical perspective into the nature of immigration into Britain with lessons for academics investigating modern racism and ethnic relations and Britain's role within the great social transformation of the Victorian industrial era. The relationship between migrant and native has been, and to a great extent still is, articulated around access to the economy and the threat of job competition. Although as far as employers are concerned the effects of migrant labour on skill shortages and wage levels is positive hence the need to keep immigration restrictions at a minimum during times of industrial expansion and increase them during contraction. From this fundamental underlying problem for the majority flowed much of the popular anti-Irish feeling in nineteenth century Britain. To this we can couple the ethnicisation of public health issues again demonstrating a modern racist preoccupation with the immigrant as destructive to public health. The phenotypical markers of skin colour is a marker of difference that did not affect the Irish. However, evidence of Irish migrants changing their names due to prejudice shows they were aware of the problems of being recognised as an immigrant in nineteenth century Britain. Cultural markers such as accent, religion, residence and recreational patterns are aspects of visibility shared by modern immigrants. Religion as an ethnic marker is a powerful tool for boundary creation. Violence and conflict between religious/ethnic groups are extreme forms of boundary maintenance. Religion also still shows potential for conflict. In Catholic terms anti-Catholicism is still strong in Scotland<sup>1</sup> and Northern Ireland. Also the discursive negative representations of Islamic and Rastafarian identities within a racist media and elsewhere demonstrate the salience of religion for ethno-national boundary creation and maintenance.



To mobilise the indigenous working class into a supportive unit to the nineteenth century British nationalism project necessitated an anti-group for the British to define their political and ideological identities from.<sup>2</sup> Although other groups such as the Scottish, Welsh, European and colonial groups played a part in this boundary creation, as did gender,<sup>3</sup> it was the poor Catholic Irish that were the most commonly encountered in the social, spiritual and political spheres at this time. The poor Catholic Irish were perfectly placed historically, economically, ideologically, politically, spiritually, ethnically, morally and religiously as the antithesis to the constructed idea of “the free born Englishman”. Within the vortex of signification, demonization and paranoia towards non-bourgeois groups that was unleashed in Victorian Britain by the strains of modernity and history, the historically politically resistive Irish became co-joined hegemonically with the Catholic dangerous “Other” in the religious realm and the economic threat to work in the popular memory that all migrants subsequently came to represent to greater and lesser extents. Colonised and criminalised; ethnicised and biologised in relation to health, the ethnic/Catholic/dirty/dangerous/exploited “Other” therefore became actualised as the antithesis of the “freeborn Englishman” in the popular discourse of the British national imagination. Within this process a template, a model and a pattern of prejudice was instigated, explored and utilised for political gain. A powerful conceptual framework was created that has resonances within the racist and anti-immigrant political discourse up unto the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> See Devine, T. M., (ed.), Scotland’s Shame: Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 2000, passim.



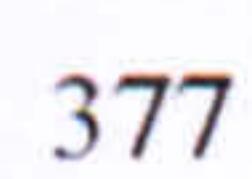
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<sup>2</sup> See Barth, op. cit., pp.10-19.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that Ireland represented as Hibernia was often depicted and illustrated as female in any contemporary Victorian texts (weak, vulnerable and in need of protection from herself as much as the outside world) as an antithesis to the colonial male/master. This is could be interpreted as a colonial hegemonic signification of Britain's natural place as protective overlord. Best notes how author Charles Kingsley typified Victorian British identity as male, the Catholic system being "unmanly, un-English and unnatural." Best, op. cit., p.124.



### **“Irish Areas” in Nineteenth Century Central Birmingham.**





## **Abbreviations.**

**B.A.A., Birmingham Archdiocesan Archives, Saint Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.**

**B.C.A., Birmingham City Archives.**

**B.R.L., Birmingham Reference Library.**

**H.L., House of Lords.**

**P.E.M.E.U., Protestant Evangelical Mission and Electoral Union.**

**P.R.O., Public Records Office.**

**S.M.C.H.A., Saint Mary's Convent Handsworth Archive.**



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